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ABSTRACT

From 1990 to 1993 PATHS/PRISM worked with five elementary schools and two middle schools in Philadelphia to try to bring about systemic change for schools serving low-income students. This Cluster Initiative attempted to achieve greater coordination of curriculum and instruction, to develop teacher-driven collegial processes, and to revamp school organizational structures. A retrospective study was conducted in 1993 using personal interviews with 80 participants, documents, observations of school staff meetings, and student outcome data. The initiative was considered to have succeeded in four schools, achieved partial success in two, and did not succeed in another. Collegiality was clearly enhanced in three schools, boosted in another, less fully implemented in two others, and lacking in one middle school. Curriculum change was significant in four schools, and reform of governance was noted in all seven to some extent. Several curricular changes involved parents to a greater degree. Four schools where the Cluster Initiative was implemented showed modest improvement in student achievement. Reasons for successful implementation and recommendations for continued change are explored. Four appendixes discuss methodology and present seven tables of data about the project. The Notes section contains 10 references. (SLD)



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# RENEWING SCHOOLS:

## A Report on the Cluster Initiative in Philadelphia

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In this work, PATHS/PRISM collaborates with the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, the Philadelphia Business-Education Partnership for School Reform, and local universities and cultural and scientific institutions to create programs that meet community needs and draw on community resources.

Results of PATHS/PRISM's pilot programs are shared with educators and policymakers through a variety of formats, including published reports.

# Renewing Schools:

## A Report on the Cluster Initiative in Philadelphia

Elizabeth L. Useem

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# *Contents*


1 Foreword

3 Executive Summary

7 Introduction

11 Finding a Common Vision and Voice

15 Moving Toward Curricular Coherence

17 Building Participatory Governance Structures

21 Reaching Out to Parents

23 Outcomes for Students

27 Ingredients of Success

29 PATHS/PRISM as External Change Agent

33 Summary and Conclusions

35 Recommendations and Observations

*Case Studies of the Seven Participating Schools*

37 Brennan Elementary School
41 Holland Elementary School
47 Perry Middle School
51 Preston Elementary School
55 Nelson Middle School
59 Wolcott Elementary School
63 Chamberlain Elementary School

67 Notes

69 Appendix A: Research Methods

71 Appendix B
Table 1. School Indicators
Table 2. Money Spent on the Cluster Initiative at School Sites

73 Appendix C: Consortium of Chicago School Research: "Classifying School Improvements During Reform"

75 Appendix D: Indicators of Student Achievement
Tables 1-5

# *Foreword*

The board and staff of PATHS/PRISM should be applauded--not only for launching the Cluster Initiative, but more importantly for drafting the ensuing systemic policy recommendations to The School District of Philadelphia. And they should be emulated by their peer local education funds around the country. They have modeled for their community how private money can be most effective in public endeavors; PATHS/PRISM strategically used private resources to impact how public schools educate children.

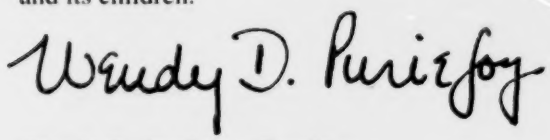
Local education funds across the country provide seed money for "laboratories of change" in public schools. In doing so, they work to leverage greater reform by partnering with the goals of larger funded projects, such as Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects. In order for relatively small amounts of private money to be effective, they must be placed strategically, and they must require the commitment of corresponding public dollars to the project. Finally, the lessons learned from a grant program must be evaluated, written, and disseminated to the community. PATHS/PRISM took this one step further and offered comprehensive recommendations to the district to change its education policies.

Although this private funding is not intended to be a substitute for the public resources that a community invests in schools, it supports innovative programs which, in turn, create powerful lessons for the district. This strategically placed, locally-generated money has the potential to impact on education policy in the district. And we at the Public Education Fund Network share these lessons with similar local education funds in other school districts across the country. PATHS/PRISM's connection to the Network enables innovations like the Cluster Initiative to ripple out to districts across the country to make real change in how we educate our children.

Local education funds work in partnership with school districts, maintaining a professional, collaborative relationship while keeping districts open to new ways of operating schools. In Philadelphia, one ingredient of the Cluster Initiative's success was the presence of a local education fund, PATHS/PRISM, which provided outside facilitating assistance to the schools. The author of the report argues that the successes of the Cluster Initiative would not have ben possible without some climate of trust between the outside agents and the participating schools.

Furthermore, the nine recommendations in this report represent exactly the role that local education funds can and should fill. PATHS/PRISM, in its role as external change agent, has used a modest amount of money to steer federal Chapter One dollars toward a broader goal. More importantly, though, they have synthesized the lessons and pitfalls from their three-year Cluster Initiative into lasting policy recommendations for the school district.

As president of a national organization of groups like PATHS/PRISM, I am proud to preface this important retrospective. Local education funds are an emerging group of the nonprofit sector whose agenda consists of developing supportive community and private sector relationships with the public schools. In short, they are about helping children and communities. The Cluster Initiative, its powerful evaluation report, and the overarching policy recommendations illustrate in a most efective way how PATHS/PRISM is working to improve its community and its children.



**Wendy D. Puriefoy, President**
**Public Education Fund Network**

# *Executive Summary*

From 1990 to 1993, PATHS/PRISM worked with five elementary schools and two middle schools in the School District of Philadelphia with the aim of bringing about systemic change in schools serving low income students. This $350,000 effort was co-sponsored by the School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and was jointly funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the School District.

The central goals of the Cluster Initiative were to:

1) **achieve greater coordination of curriculum and instruction across disciplines and grades at school sites;**

2) **develop teacher-driven collegial processes that would make curriculum and instructional reform an ongoing effort;**

3) **revamp schools' organizational structures, including governance mechanisms, to increase participatory, decentralized decisionmaking.**

The long-range goal was the improvement of student achievement by re-energizing the staff as a whole in the context of curriculum change.

This retrospective study of the Cluster Initiative was conducted from October through December, 1993. Evidence for the study's conclusions came from four sources: personal interviews with 80 participants in the initiative; documents such as focus group transcripts, minutes of meetings, correspondence, reports, School Improvement Plans and school Educational Plans; observations of school staff meetings; and student outcome data provided by the School District.

*Study Findings*

1) **Overall Impact: The initiative succeeded in four schools, achieved partial success in two schools, and did not succeed in another.** The successful schools generally moved from a stage of school improvement characterized by uncoordinated initiatives to one where they had a more coherent and sustained set of school-change strategies. In the five schools that also received funds from Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects, the Cluster Initiative was most successful where it acted in concert with the change strategies and resources provided by those federal funds.

2) **Collegial Staff Culture**: PATHS/PRISM's invitation to schools to "imagine" a new educational vision in an open-ended way and to create schoolwide participatory structures to carry out that vision resulted in a re-energized and unified teaching staff in three elementary schools. It provided a significant boost to an already-existing collegial culture at a fourth elementary school. The initiative helped steer faculty toward a common vision at two other schools but failed to be fully implemented there. At one middle school, no progress was made in creating a more collegial staff environment.

3) **Curriculum Change**: At four elementary schools, major schoolwide curriculum initiatives were undertaken along one or more of the following lines: the implementation of a reading and language arts curriculum emphasizing "whole language"; the creation or extension of interdisciplinary thematic units stressing the study of several different cultural groups; the adoption of mathematics teaching materials and methods congruent with the new national standards in that discipline; and the development of new ways of assessing students' work. A fifth school implemented an ungraded interdisciplinary Friday afternoon elective period.

4) **Governance Reform**: The Cluster Initiative schools had an extraordinarily high rate of implementation of site-based management and shared decision-making. All of the seven schools took the initial step toward School-Based Management/ Shared Decision-Making by filing a Letter of Intent compared with only one fourth of the District's schools. Three of the five Cluster Initiative elementary schools set up Governance Councils and had their Educational Plans approved at the school site and by the school system's Joint Committee on Restructuring compared with only three percent (six schools) of the District's elementary schools overall. The other two Cluster Initiative elementary schools have set up Governance Councils and are nearing completion of the draft of their Educational Plans. While the effort to restructure governance did not meet with the kind of staff enthusiasm that characterized the curriculum change activities, the staff at four of the five schools which remained committed to the process of governance change viewed its impact as mostly favorable.

5) **Outreach to Parents**: Efforts to reach out to parents increased at all of the schools over the life of the initiative, but most of those efforts can be attributed to other initiatives such as Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects. However, the Cluster Initiative at one school aimed for and achieved significantly enhanced involvement of parents and other relatives. Further, several curricular changes resulting from the Cluster Initiative involved parents to a greater degree as did the creation of Governance Councils.

6) **Student Achievement**: Among the four schools where the Cluster Initiative was fully implemented, student achievement showed modest improvement. Gains in students' reading achievement occurred in three out of four measures in the four schools where the Cluster Initiative was successful. The substantial infusion of resources supplied by Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects in three of these four schools undoubtedly played a major role in strengthening the academic program there.

7) **Ingredients of Success**: The initiative succeeded in schools where a) there was a history of reasonably respectful relations between the faculty and principal and among the faculty themselves; b) one or more highly capable and committed teachers or administrators took on the task of following up on plans and ideas; c) the principal was supportive; d) a committee structure was established that included the entire staff; e) one or more staff had a previous record of involvement with PATHS/PRISM programs and a desire to involve more of their colleagues in PATHS/PRISM work; f) Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects funds were coordinated with the plans that emerged from the Cluster Initiative; and g) the staff availed themselves of the professional development opportunities offered by the initiative.

8) **External Change Agent**: According to the participants in the schools, the presence of an outside facilitating organization, in this case PATHS/PRISM, was essential to the effective implementation of the Cluster Initiative. The support of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers was also pivotal in securing teachers' commitment to the effort. PATHS/PRISM staff were more proficient in mediating change in elementary schools than they were in the more complex organizational environment of middle schools.

*Recommendations and Observations*

- School renewal and restructuring initiatives should be faculty driven and site-based.
- Renewal efforts must include intensive professional development for teams of teachers and other staff. Such efforts should be broadly defined to include creative adaptations and implementation of national, state, and local curriculum standards and assessments as they become available.
- An external change agent and external funds are needed in the initial stages of a whole school renewal effort.
- Those involved in a school change process should recognize that the creation of interactive and reflective staff cultures can take several years of work to come into being and should not be rushed.
- Renewal attempts must involve all staff in some sort of committee structure.
- Relatively small school renewal grants, together with technical assistance from an outside change agent, can be used effectively to generate site-based reform strategies that then drive the use of larger discretionary funds such as Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects. It is the use of these substantial sums that will ultimately determine the permanence of reform.
- School improvement initiatives should seek to develop staffs' commitment to and skill at documenting change carefully and applying for external grants that will assist them in sustaining and extending their reform agendas.
- Schools characterized by a climate of pervasive and profound mistrust between the principal and faculty should address those issues prior to becoming involved in a major school renewal initiative with an outside facilitating organization.
- The School District should commit itself to a personnel policy that keeps effective principals in place for a minimum of five years in those schools undertaking major renewal and restructuring efforts.

# *Introduction*

In the spring of 1990, PATHS/PRISM embarked on its first venture into whole school renewal. Prior to that, its work as a public/private partnership in support of the School District of Philadelphia had focused on teachers drawn from across the district. Thus the decision to launch an initiative aimed at revitalizing curriculum and instruction within whole schools was a marked departure from its previous reform efforts.

The three-year initiative with five elementary schools and two middle schools was co-sponsored by the School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and was funded jointly by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the School District. **The evidence compiled for this report indicates that the initiative succeeded in four schools, attained partial success in two schools, and did not succeed in one school.** Relatively modest sums of money spent at school sites sparked significant changes in some school cultures. The lessons learned from the effort have informed PATHS/PRISM's subsequent work on whole school change.

These conclusions have been arrived at through this retrospective study. From October through December, 1993, evidence was pulled together from several sources: documents assembled over the three year life of the initiative, including minutes of meetings, focus group transcripts, questionnaires, correspondence, School Improvement Plans and Educational Plans; observations of school meetings (one per school); reports written by the Director of School Programs at PATHS/PRISM who oversaw the initiative; and student outcome data provided by the School District of Philadelphia. In addition, eighty participants were interviewed, including all of the principals, at least six faculty per school, and two parents at each school who were either head of the Home and School Association or on the Governance Council. (See Appendix A for a fuller description.)

The participating schools were chosen through a collaborative process involving the Superintendent's office and regional offices of the School District, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), and PATHS/PRISM staff. The initial invitation to the schools was made through the PFT to the Building Committees at each school site followed by larger meetings with school staffs who had to agree as a whole unit to join the initiative. Schools that were regarded as having relatively collegial relations among and between the teachers and principal were selected from two feeder patterns in two of the district's regions.

In all but one of the schools (the only one that did not fit into a neighborhood cluster pattern), 85 percent to 95 percent of the student body came from low income homes. Widespread poverty and the resulting urgency to improve students' opportunities formed the often-unspoken backdrop of this initiative. (Table 1 in Appendix B) The Cluster Initiative's significance lies partly in the fact that there are few systemic change efforts such as this that have taken place in the nation's poorest schools.[1]

PATHS/PRISM served as the facilitating external organization that provided support and resources to the participating schools. As the external change agent, PATHS/PRISM staff arranged retreats and customized staff development sessions,

ran meetings at school sites, consulted with school staffs as they worked to achieve the initiative's goals, provided materials on school improvement strategies, arranged cross-site visits, assisted with grant proposals and educational plans, allowed for priority access to other PATHS/PRISM curriculum development programs, and provided budgetary oversight.

*Goals and Philosophy*

The Cluster Initiative, which was conceived and shaped by the Director of PATHS, had four explicitly stated goals. The first was to achieve greater articulation throughout the curriculum, both within school sites across grades and disciplines, and then across schools that operated as a cluster or feeder pattern within a region of the district. The second goal was aimed at involving teachers in refining and enhancing the district's Standardized Curriculum in ways that promoted cross-grade and interdisciplinary learning. The third aim of the project was to develop teacher-driven processes that would make curriculum and instructional reform an ongoing effort. And the fourth and final goal was to revamp schools' organizational structures to provide greater support for these reform efforts. This latter "restructuring" goal became more salient once the joint agreement on School-Based Management/Shared Decision-making was announced in June, 1990. The District and the PFT expected the Cluster Initiative schools to lead the way in forming Governance Councils and finalizing Educational Plans in accordance with that agreement.

Increased student achievement was not one of the four explicitly stated goals, but it was referred to in project documents as "the overarching goal" of the Cluster Initiative. The immediate goals of the effort were to achieve a sense of staff revitalization around curriculum questions since it was PATHS/PRISM's belief that real changes in teaching and learning could not occur unless teachers were committed to the change agenda. But infused throughout the effort was the underlying belief that the point of the reforms was increased student learning.

Several philosophical assumptions about school improvement, developed and articulated by the PATHS Director, undergirded PATHS/PRISM's approach as it undertook this effort.[2] The initiative's prospectus contended that changes in curriculum and instruction should be the driving force for change. It articulated the belief that the individual school site and its teachers should be the locus for these changes, and that teachers should be provided with the time and resources, especially intensive professional development opportunities, needed to become "reflective practitioners." Change would occur if it were planned and conducted by whole faculties rather than by individuals or small groups, and faculty would become more involved in efforts to raise student achievement once they gained greater voice in decisions about curriculum and instruction. The prospectus stressed the view that all students can learn and achieve in school, and that this learning is enhanced when parents are connected to school revitalization efforts. Finally, the prospectus called for flexible ground rules to promote an environment of risk-taking and for patience to allow this inherently developmental process to unfold in stages over a period of time.

Schools were given a broad mandate to construct their own vision of change

Reviewing these beliefs in hindsight, it is remarkable how accurately they characterized the initiative over the entire three-year period and how they continue to guide PATHS/PRISM's work. This effort was not a project or particular program, as was the case with other PATHS/PRISM programs, but was instead a strategy for attempting school renewal with these philosophical assumptions in mind. Schools were given a broad mandate to construct their own vision of change as long as it focused on curriculum and instruction and reached out to the entire school staff. Peripheral "add on" programs that did not reflect a common vision of learning and that were uncoordinated with other school initiatives were discouraged. School staffs could tap into funds set aside for school grants to support the initiative—$20,000 per school the first year, $12,000 the second year, and $7500 the third year—once they developed a plan and submitted it for approval to PATHS/PRISM. Initial start-up costs for staff planning during the spring and summer of 1990 were covered (up to $5500 per school) by the overall budget for the initiative.

*Degree of Success*

A review of the amounts of grant money actually spent at each site reveals the degree of success of the effort in those schools. In the four schools that achieved the goal of teacher-driven school renewal, an average of almost 80 percent of the available funds were spent; in the two schools where the effort was partially successful, only 21 percent and 35 percent of the monies were used; and in the school where the initiative did not succeed, only 14 percent of the funds were tapped. In the successful schools, a total of approximately $31,000 to $40,000 in grant money per school was spent over the three year period. (Table 2 in Appendix B) When overall program costs are figured in, including PATHS/PRISM staff and overhead as well as initiative-wide activities, the entire effort cost approximately $350,000.

Most of the goals of the Cluster Initiative were achieved in the majority of the schools. However, the goals of increasing coordination among schools in a feeder pattern and refining the District's Standardized Curriculum were never really addressed as activities unfolded, and thus it would be a mistake to evaluate these dimensions of the effort. It became clear early on in the initiative that the need for work within the individual schools was such an immediate and consuming priority that articulation across schools would have to be deferred. The inclusion of a goal referring to refinement and enhancement of the Standardized Curriculum, a citywide instructional framework introduced into the School District in 1984 by Superintendent Constance Clayton, was a political necessity at the time the prospectus was written. In practice, however, the School District was broadening its reform agenda during this period and no longer viewed the Standardized Curriculum as the centerpiece of school improvement. Teachers, sensing that the District was beginning to back off from these centralized curriculum guidelines, were becoming more pro-active in fashioning reforms in curriculum and instruction at their school sites.

One way of summarizing the results of the initiative is to look at what the staff and parents said in response to interview questions inquiring about the degree

to which they had achieved school improvement. Those interviewed for this study were asked to describe their school improvement efforts according to a classification scheme developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research.[3] (See Appendix C) This typology labels schools as stressing "environmental order" (e.g. increasing school safety and security and building repairs) to those at a stage of "unfocused initiatives" to those achieving "systemic school restructuring."

The respondents at the four schools which this study has identified as "successful" generally agreed that the Cluster Initiative had played a key or pivotal role in helping them to move from a stage of "unfocused initiatives" or from "emergent restructuring" toward "sustained systemic activity" which involved most teachers and classrooms in the school. The school where the initiative failed saw itself as only now just reaching the stage of "environmental order" with the arrival of a new administrative team. The two schools where the goals of the initiative were only partially met classified themselves as moving toward or in a stage of "emergent restructuring."

The following section of the report details the results of the Cluster Initiative in several substantive areas: the development of a common school vision and a collegial environment among the staff; the adoption of new curricular approaches that affected most of a school's classrooms; the creation of more participatory governance structures; the development of greater outreach to parents; and changes in outcomes for students.

# *Finding a Common Vision and Voice*

From its founding in 1984, PATHS/PRISM had conducted numerous workshops, courses, and projects with individual teachers and groups of teachers across the school district. By the late 1980s, however, the organization's leadership became increasingly convinced that in order for meaningful school improvement to occur, the teaching and administrative staffs of whole schools had to be involved in change efforts. The Cluster Initiative was designed to bring teachers together around curricular and instructional issues in a way that would foster an interactive collegial culture aimed at raising student engagement and achievement. The hope was that the initiative would help reduce teachers' professional isolation and thereby raise morale, community consciousness and craft knowledge.

The Cluster Initiative kicked off with a Saturday retreat for all the schools at the Philadelphia Hershey Hotel in April, 1990. The individual schools then planned meetings and workshops for the rest of the spring and summer of that year in order to come up with some kind of vision and plan that would guide their subsequent work. When the fall began, the schools followed up on their summer planning, usually through the establishment of committees that had been charged with carrying out an aspect of the newly-developed mission. In the four schools where the initiative succeeded, these committee meetings as well as staff development sessions and further retreats continued over the three-year period. Cluster Initiative funds were often used to pay staff for their planning time, but in many instances, teachers chose not to pay themselves but instead to use funds for classroom materials, school events, consultants or trainers, or some other purpose.

*Substantial Progress*

PATHS/PRISM's invitation to schools to "imagine" a new educational vision in an open-ended way and to create schoolwide participatory structures to carry out that vision resulted in a re-energized and unified teaching staff in three elementary schools which we shall call Brennan, Holland, and Wolcott schools.[4] In these schools, a reasonably collegial culture existed among the staff and between the staff and principal prior to the beginning of the Cluster Initiative but their meetings and interactions were not systematically focused on curriculum, instruction, and the needs of the children. The activities of the initiative led them to have sustained discussions about the ways in which they could change children's learning experiences and resulted in alterations in instruction that involved almost every classroom in the school. This is how several participants described it in the interviews:

At Brennan School:

> *It's created a new atmosphere of being open to new things and trying new things ... Our attitude is "try it and see how it works." We are constantly refining ... The number of people interested who've made changes has grown each year. (Principal)*

*We have a kind of boldness now, not arrogance. PATHS/PRISM took us to a new level and now we're moving on and taking advantage of new openings and opportunities. We do know what we are talking about in a sense ... We can focus on the specific needs of our kids. (Teacher)*[5]

At Holland School:

*We were all doing our own little thing before. The Cluster Initiative brought us together and we did one big effort. (Teacher)*

*I think it's made a tremendous tremendous difference. The buy-in of the teachers is unbelievable, their willingness to adapt, the leadership growth that has emerged, and the professionalism displayed almost surprises me. Some of these people have just blossomed. A real collegiality was established and it wasn't a lot of money. But this money came with no real restrictions on it and it was able to be used in ways we couldn't do before. It absolutely made a critical difference and I'm not one to overstate. (Principal)*

*PATHS/PRISM was very gentle with us and let us take our own route and trusted us to let us go our own way ... It brought us together as a faculty ... and identified to us areas of importance and helped us coordinate little programs under one umbrella. (Teacher)*

At Wolcott School:

*The biggest change is there are so many more teacher leaders in this school ... We are a much classier school: we do agendas, we plan, we are responsible for ourselves now ... We run our own organization now and mostly we know where we want to go although we may need support getting there ... We were not treated like idiots. The level of professional self-esteem—that's what's changed here. (Teacher)*

*We became more aware of what the children needed rather than what we needed. (Teacher)*

*The atmosphere became focused on what children and adults can do rather than on obstacles. (Teacher)*

In a fourth school, Preston Elementary, an already-existing collegial culture was given a significant boost by the Cluster Initiative. The school has a long history of teacher-driven innovation, including, in recent years, an emphasis on writing and on whole language instruction and on thematic instructional units. The potential for division among the faculty in this school, however, is ever-present because of historic differences in educational philosophy. For two decades, some of the classrooms in the school have been structured along an "open classroom" model while other classrooms are characterized by more traditional pedagogical approaches. Nevertheless, the staff has long been skilled at coming together on tasks that focus on improving instruction. Cluster Initiative activities supported and enhanced "common ground" among the teachers, enriching their thematic units and facilitating new approaches to teaching mathematics. They put it this way:

Cluster Initiative activities supported and enhanced "common ground" among the teachers

> *The Cluster Initiative was exciting. It helped put more focus into what we were doing. It gave us time to talk and showed us where we were alike in terms of classroom and children ... It cut across classroom philosophies. (Teacher)*
>
> *It helped us to continue to grow and work together and share our strengths. Without it, we would have drifted further apart ... (Teacher)*
>
> *We couldn't get beyond a small group working together unless there was outside money and support for a new vision. PATHS/PRISM provided that ... Schools need help sustaining a vision. If all outside money and support went away, it would peter out. At Preston, it would take longer to peter out there than other schools, but it would peter out. (Teacher)*

*Partial Progress*

In two other schools, Chamberlain Elementary and Perry Middle School, progress was made toward creating greater staff cohesion focused on educational issues, but school-wide unity and revitalization did not emerge during the life of the Cluster Initiative. At both schools, administrative turnover, among other things, hampered efforts to sustain the initiative. School-wide committees to implement plans were never established, leaving just a core group who were aware and involved.

At Chamberlain, teachers succeeded in creating a cross-grade elective period on Friday afternoons and have nearly finished writing an Educational Plan for approval for School Based Management/Shared Decision Making. Still, unable to overcome divisions within the faculty, a strong sense of cohesion and teamwork has eluded them. There was a consensus among those interviewed that the situation "was not rosy *or* negative" and that "we have problems but we are moving ahead." The process of developing and teaching the elective time course offerings was "a shot in the arm" according to one teacher and was described by another as "the first time the whole school came together."

At Perry Middle School, where staff morale seems comparatively high, it is difficult to isolate the impact of the Cluster Initiative because the school has been involved in a number of efforts, including two other PATHS/PRISM programs. By most accounts, the initiative sparked a sharing of ideas among administrators and teachers about curriculum and assisted them in communicating "across race, class, and gender lines on reform issues." One observer noted that when the initiative began, it moved faculty from a focus on their own welfare to issues with a more academic focus. Although it helped "steer faculty in the right direction ... toward a common vision," according to one teacher, the effort apparently suffered from poor coordination and follow-up.

Part of the explanation for the lack of full implementation of the Cluster Initiative at Perry was PATHS/PRISM's own inexperience in dealing with whole school change at the middle school level. According to PATHS/PRISM staff members, the organization did not have a real appreciation of "the differing challenges" presented by the two levels of schooling. A "middle school strategy" that took into account the organizational complexity of middle schools versus elementary schools had not yet been developed by either PATHS/PRISM or the School District. It is no accident that the Cluster Initiative succeeded fully only at the elementary school level.

*No Progress*

Virtually no advancement toward creating a more collegial staff environment took place at Nelson Middle School as a result of the Cluster Initiative. This occurred primarily because of a staff culture with deep and multiple fractures: the faculty and principal did not work well together and the faculty was divided among itself. As one parent put it, "When you walked in, you *knew* who disliked each other on the staff." In addition, the school went through a period of administrative turnover. Although a group of faculty worked diligently and came up with creative ideas for reform in the early planning phase of the initiative, they could not make inroads into a divided and complacent staff culture. The one positive result of the initiative is that the organizers came to appreciate the depth of the problem of communication and realized that they needed to start with team building strategies in the future if they were to make significant headway in changing the school.

# *Moving Toward Curricular Coherence*

The development of more collegial staff cultures took place within the context of an effort to achieve a more integrated and coherent curriculum across disciplines and across grades. At Brennan, Holland, and Wolcott Schools, major new curricular initiatives were launched under the aegis of the Cluster Initiative. At Preston, existing integrated instructional approaches were strengthened and new strategies in math were implemented. At Perry and Chamberlain, the work along these curricular lines was less intense and comprehensive but was still measurable whereas initial curriculum ideas at Nelson flourished for a just a few months before withering completely.

The work around student learning generally focused on three areas: the implementation of a language arts curriculum emphasizing "whole language" approaches (i.e. reading for meaning in a wide variety of children's books, learning grammar and phonics in the context of literature, and writing frequently in different modes and for different audiences); the creation of interdisciplinary thematic units stressing the study of several different cultural groups and historical periods; and the development of new ways of assessing student work. One school devoted much of its work to changes in the math curriculum while the faculties of two others turned their attention to math only towards the end of the initiative.

The work on the implementation of whole language strategies, recommended by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, took the form of staff development, the purchase of class sets of children's literature books, and priority participation in PATHS/PRISM courses such as Good Books for Great Kids and Building the Foundations (a two-week summer workshop). Faculty were not forced to adopt this form of teaching, but were introduced, over time, to this approach. Gradually, as the number of teachers voluntarily accepting variants of whole language instruction grew from year to year, whole language became institutionalized as the dominant mode of language arts instruction in the three elementary schools which had chosen that as a primary thrust of their Cluster Initiative work.

The five schools which chose to develop multi-cultural interdisciplinary thematic units approached their work in different ways. At Preston, teachers in all grades had already developed highly successful six week units (one per year) on China, Greece, and Africa. The activities of the Cluster Initiative added richness and depth to these existing units, allowing for the purchase of new books and materials, the hiring of performing artists, and further staff development. This prevented the stagnation that can set in if such units are not frequently re-worked and enhanced. The social studies units at Brennan were developed and refined from year to year as faculty experimented with thematic instruction about other countries. The Cluster Initiative paid for intensive staff development (including a faculty trip to Ellis Island), class sets of trade books that integrated language arts with the thematic units, and dramatic participatory school-wide culminating events following the completion of each unit.

At Wolcott, a cross-grade interdisciplinary community history project transformed social studies teaching. Funds from the initiative paid not just for

planning, staff development and materials, but also for student trips to Ellis Island and to Washington, D.C. Some of the staff at Perry and Chamberlain schools worked on thematic multi-cultural units as well. At Perry, the Cluster Initiative provided the planning time that led to the idea for multi-cultural interdisciplinary thematic units, one of which was eventually written under the auspices of a second PATHS/PRISM grant and used by an entire middle school "house," and a second was planned. Similar interdisciplinary approaches were integrated into the Friday afternoon elective period created at Chamberlain as a result of the Cluster Initiative and into ongoing plans and grant applications for a globally-oriented curriculum.

New ways of teaching went hand in hand with new modes of assessment. Preston, Holland, Wolcott and Brennan have become pilot sites for the joint work of the School District and PATHS/PRISM on performance assessment. These schools are also experimenting with less traditional report cards and parent conference sheets that give a more nuanced view of students' work. A team of teachers from Holland and Wolcott have become part of the William Penn Foundation's Arts Empower initiative, run by PATHS/PRISM, which aims at using the arts as an avenue to curriculum renewal and multiple modes of assessment.

The staff at Preston drew on the Cluster Initiative funds to become trained in the methods and strategies of the new national curriculum standards put out by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. In addition, math manipulatives were purchased for all classes, and teachers created a library of professional books on the teaching of mathematics. As one teacher put it, "for me, it completely changed the way I teach math." She added that the degree of change varied by teacher, a phenomenon that was true for all of the curriculum efforts that took place as a result of the Cluster Initiative. At Holland, a Heuristic Math committee was formed during the third year of the Cluster Initiative to address changes in the math curriculum. Wolcott faculty, encouraged by their success at developing school-wide approaches to language arts and social studies, are now turning their attention to mathematics instruction.

These curricular initiatives, of course, represent only the beginning stages of innovation in most of the schools. It will take more time to effect changes in teaching and learning on a sustained daily basis in all classrooms.

# *Building Participatory Governance Structures*

In June, 1990, a joint agreement on School-Based Management and Shared Decision-Making was announced by the School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. According to this agreement, school staffs could pursue participatory decision-making and decentralized management at the school site once they submitted a Letter of Intent to that effect, established an Interim Governance Council, wrote an Educational Plan for school improvement, and secured approval of that plan by 75 percent of the staff. A fully functioning Governance Council would be in place once the school's Educational Plan was approved by the the district/union Joint Committee on Restructuring. The 13-15 member Governance Council would include administrators, instructional and non-instructional staff, and parents. The majority of the Council's members were to be members of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. The Governance Councils were meant to allow greater discretion in budget, staffing, and curriculum decisions at the school level than had previously been the case and to provide a formal vehicle for increased staff and parental involvement in decision-making. This particular version of site-based management, however, did not allow schools to hire their own principals and teachers.

PATHS/PRISM was charged with the task of facilitating the movement of Cluster Initiative schools through the steps required to achieve that governance status. PFT officials also provided significant technical assistance to schools in this effort. These schools were to be at the crest of governance change. And, indeed, by November, 1990, all of the seven schools had filed Letters of Intent with the District. By contrast, only one quarter of the District's schools had filed such letters as of February, 1994.

All but one took the next step of forming Governance Councils, and three, Wolcott, Holland and Brennan, moved expeditiously to have their final Educational Plans approved both by their staffs and the Joint Committee on Restructuring. Preston and Chamberlain are close to completing their Educational Plans. Nelson Middle School no longer has an active Governance Council. Perry Middle School decided early on not to establish one but instead relied on its Leadership Team, required by Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects, to play a role similar to a Governance Council.

This rate of implementation of School-Based Management/Shared Decision-making far exceeds the rate of other schools in the District: three-fifths of the Cluster Initiative elementary schools have a fully established participatory governance system compared with only 3 percent of other elementary schools. Put another way, three of the six elementary schools districtwide completing the process were Cluster Initiative schools, and a fourth had received similar attention from PATHS/PRISM in its replication of Cluster Initiative work with other Letter of Intent schools.

The faculty at Wolcott School who were interviewed were the most enthusiastic about the impact of having an active Governance Council at their school. As one teacher put it, "For us, that's where people got empowered and felt

responsible for what's happened in the school." Discussions and decision-making have focused on curriculum and instruction, rather than on the non-instructional issues which tend to preoccupy most councils of this sort.[6] In the spring of 1993 when the School District asked the Governance Councils to participate in making decisions about where to cut the school's budget, a request opposed by the PFT, the members of the Wolcott council refused to do so "because we felt it would destroy our spirit."

At Wolcott, Governance Council discussions and decision-making have focused on curriculum and instruction, rather than on the non-instructional issues which tend to preoccupy most councils of this sort

At Holland, which had had a productive experience with a Governance Council up until the budget-cutting request, members did vote on the budget reductions. But the divisiveness caused by the vote nearly unraveled the progress that had been made in developing a collegial staff culture. Staff members are still trying to heal the rifts that were created by that vote. Still, the principal argues that, overall, the Governance Council has had a positive effect at the school:

> *At this school, Shared Decisionmaking/School-Based Management is a real program. We hold real meetings and take real minutes and do things together. It is not just a title. The teachers are keeping the principal honest. It doesn't make my job easier but I like it. It's more interesting.*

The principal at Brennan school echoed similar sentiments:

> *For me, it's been fine. More heads are better, and by talking you get better ideas. I'm real comfortable with it. Things don't just come from me. The group must know what it's like to make a decision and live with it and see the bigger picture of the school. People on the Governance Council find out that people don't want to monitor their colleagues.*

But staff sentiment at Brennan is mixed. One teacher felt that the school could be run in a democratic way even without the Governance Council; another doubted the District would cede real authority; and another felt there were too many leadership groups at the school (Leadership Team for Schoolwide Projects, PFT Building Committee, Steering Committee for another grant). Other teachers were more positive with one describing the Governance Council as "a curricular change engine."

A core of faculty at Chamberlain has moved ahead on writing an Educational Plan, supported by Cluster Initiative funds, even though the school has not had stable administrative leadership. Those interviewed tended to see the existing Governance Council as "helpful" or "providing a boost." As is typical at this school, enthusiasm is muted. Expressions such as "we're moving ahead" and "it's not a positive thing but it's a challenge and can be effective" characterized their observations.

The faculty at Preston are clearly pained by the process they have gone through in creating a Governance Council and writing an Educational Plan. One of the more charitable comments by one teacher was "it's there. It's something we have to deal with." Many teachers see the time invested in the process as a distraction from their

real work: "Governance is not our issue," argued one teacher, "curriculum is." In this school of fewer than 300 students with a long history of teacher activism in instruction, many felt that they had autonomy already, and that on the "big" issues such as the hiring of personnel, the District would never give real authority to the schools. However, the two parents interviewed as well as one teacher felt that the Governance Council was going to be an important vehicle for addressing long-festering divisions in the school. According to one parent, "the Governance Council will help us deal with unspoken issues that were draining our energy."

At Perry Middle School, a Governance Council was created but never got off the ground, due in large part to the frequent turnover of principals. There was no strong sentiment in favor of moving toward School-Based Management/Shared Decision-making among those interviewed, in part because they were reasonably satisfied with the functioning of the Leadership Team required by Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects. This team, composed of about 16 faculty and administrators and chaired by the Acting Principal, meets weekly. Based on observation of one meeting, the group's members appear to participate freely in a fairly wide-ranging discussion of school issues. It is likely that further movement toward the formal participatory governance process will not occur unless a permanent principal is appointed who is strongly committed to seeing it through.

A Governance Council was created at Nelson Middle School but was never a viable governance unit before it fizzled out. In the words of one teacher, there was little progress made on arriving at decisions at meetings. "We were just clawing at each other. We did not have the group process skills to function as a group. We went around in circles." Those interviewed were vague in their knowledge about what had happened to the Governance Council. There is no Leadership Team since the school is not a Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects site, only a small principal's cabinet which acts in an advisory capacity.

In sum, the restructuring of governance has worked well in two of the schools, was functioning in a positive way in a third school until a vote on budget-cutting occurred, is moving along in its development in two other schools, and has failed to be implemented in the two middle schools. Overall, the Cluster Initiative's effort to restructure governance generated less enthusiasm among staff than its attempt to foster collegiality and curriculum change. At several schools, however, the Governance Council is acting in a way that appears to deepen and extend curricular innovation. By comparison with other schools in the District, where the push for School-Based Management/Shared Decision-making has met with distrust and lack of support among instructional staff, the Cluster Initiative schools have been far more committed to and successful at implementing a more decentralized and participatory governance structure. As a group, they have been leaders in this area of change in the Philadelphia public schools.

Overall, the Cluster Initiative's effort to restructure governance generated less enthusiasm among staff than its attempt to foster collegiality and curriculum change

# *Reaching Out to Parents*

In all of the Cluster Initiative schools, the administration and faculty have been concerned with increasing parent involvement in their children's education and the affairs of the school. Most of these schools have improved their efforts at parental outreach since the spring of 1990 when the Cluster Initiative began, but these attempts are largely the result of other programs supported by the School District, including Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects. Only one of the seven schools, Holland Elementary, had parent involvement as a formal articulated component of its Cluster Initiative plan. However, some of the curricular projects spurred by the initiative did lead to greater involvement of parents, and, of course, the creation of Governance Councils involved a handful of parents in school decision-making.

At Holland, increased parent involvement was one of three major goals defined by the staff for their Cluster Initiative plan. A permanent committee of teachers, teaching assistants, parents, and other staff was established early in the life of the initiative and continues today. A range of outreach activities were conducted, including Grandparents' Day, a major event (or "happening" in the words of one teacher) which annually attracts between 250 and 300 grandparents and other relatives. One of the parents interviewed for this study cited the work of the committee as "extraordinary" in involving parents in volunteer activities and on the Governance Council and in helping to create an atmosphere where parents felt comfortable coming into the office and talking to the school principal and other staff. Open House attendance has increased from about 100-150 parents to over 200 parents.

The curricular projects in some schools, particularly the community history unit at Wolcott, have included a parental involvement component. The culminating activities of multicultural units at Brennan also draw in parents from the diverse ethnic community served by the school in a way that heightens sensitivity to other ethnic groups. Further, as a result of their experience in the Cluster Initiative, school staff applied for and were accepted to participate in a new initiative of the Center for Urban Ethnography at the University of Pennsylvania ("Taking Stock/Making Change") which, as one of its activities, has reached out to parents in face-to-face interviews in their own language and is planning parental focus groups. Wolcott's developing reputation as an innovative school as a results of its Cluster Initiative activities led to its selection in a parent involvement program sponsored by Temple University. At Preston, parents contributed in various ways to the activities of the thematic units on China, Greece, and Africa. Further, the Home and School Association provided funds to purchase books for the units and for publication of student writing anthologies. In this instance, then, the Cluster Initiative funds helped leverage significant financial support from parents.

The parents interviewed for this research included the president of the Home and School Association and, in schools where one existed, a parent representative to the Governance Council. The seven parents (from five schools) who had served or are now serving on the Councils felt these governance bodies were valuable in making parents more informed members of the school community. Only one of the seven said that parents on the Councils had little power. Another said she was too embarrassed to ask the meanings of technical terms that were used at the meetings but blamed herself for not seeking clarification.

# *Outcomes for Students*

The Cluster Initiative shied away from specifying any particular student outcomes or establishing an accountability system for student performance. Fearing that such a mandate would have been the "kiss of death" for the initiative, PATHS/PRISM staff focused instead on the teacher and curriculum renewal piece of the complicated educational change puzzle. They believed that common staff planning for classroom change would raise teachers' expectations for students and simultaneously chip away at cynical and defeatist attitudes. This approach has been buoyed by recent research which shows that teachers' energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to the learning of *all* students increases when professional isolation is reduced.[7] Thus, the major focus of this study is on changes in teachers and other staff, not on student outcomes.

There are a number of problems in trying to tie students' academic performance to the reforms instituted by the Cluster Initiative. It is premature to evaluate outcomes definitively since the curriculum changes have been in place just one to three years. Further, all of the achievement measures used here are seriously flawed in one way or another.[8] In addition, changes in achievement indicators can be attributed to several different factors of which the Cluster Initiative was only one. The most significant infusion of new resources into five of these schools, for example, came from Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects. Thus the data presented here should be seen as tentative and incomplete and judgments about causality should be advanced with caution.

*Sources and Types of Data*

The data assessing student achievement come from several sources. Standardized test scores in reading and mathematics were made available from the School District's Office of Accountability and Assessment. However, comparative data exist only for 1992 and 1993 because a new test was introduced in May, 1992 (the Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills or CTBS). Comparative information exists for all students in the seven schools who took the test in one or both of those two years. In addition, achievement gains or losses for individual students were calculated comparing only those students who took the test in both years in a given school. Using the data from these students (56 percent to 75 percent of their respective student bodies), School District researchers computed an average gain or loss score for each grade at each school. These changes are expressed arithmetically in normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores. This measure of assessing comparative annual achievement growth for Chapter 1 students is required by federal regulation even though its reliability is compromised by the existence of standard errors and the phenomenon of regression to the mean.[9] For the purposes of this analysis, the NCEs were computed for all students in the school who took the test both years regardless of their Chapter 1 status.

Data on the percentage of students reading at grade level (based on teachers' reports of which book level a student was reading at the end of the year) over a several-year period were also made available from the District as were multi-year

changes in the percentage of students receiving an A, B or C by subject. The School Improvement Plans for each school also documented year-to-year changes in measures of achievement, but often the types of measures varied from school to school and, within schools, from year to year. Improvements in the teaching of writing were stressed in these Cluster Initiative schools, but writing proficiency is not yet assessed in a manner that allows comparisons among schools.

*Results*

Students in high poverty schools in Philadelphia and other parts of the country have low scores on norm-referenced standardized tests. The high poverty schools in the Cluster Initiative are no exception to this pattern. Among third graders in these schools, for example, 15 percent to 33 percent of the students had 1993 reading comprehension scores at or above the 51st percentile nationally, and these percentages dipped to between 12 percent and 14 percent among fourth graders. The only school where average reading scores approximated national norms was Preston where "only" half of the children are from low income homes. Teachers' reports of students' reading levels, which show that 54 percent to 68 percent of the children in the low income elementary schools are reading at or above grade level, are at variance with these scores. The two middle schools report much lower percentages of students (32 percent and 39 percent) reading at grade level. (Appendix D, Tables 1 and 2)

The achievement indicators show that gains in students' reading achievement have occurred in three out of four reading measures in the four schools where the Cluster Initiative was successful. (Results will be reported here only for reading scores except for Preston School which focused its change efforts on both reading and math.) The four measures are the NCE change scores, changes in the percentage of students reading at grade level using both report card data and the individual schools' definitions of reading level, and changes in the percentage of students receiving a C or better on their report cards.

The achievement data from Brennan School are the most encouraging of all the schools in the Cluster Initiative. (Appendix D, Tables 1-5) At Brennan, the percentage of students making As, Bs, or Cs in Reading on their report cards rose from 68 percent to 75 percent between 1990 and 1993. The percentage reading at grade level measured by students' book level has increased since 1991 among third and fourth graders by 6 percent and 29 percent respectively with 72 percent of fourth graders recorded as reading at or above grade level in 1993. Comparisons of the CTBS Reading Comprehension scores of students taking both the 1992 and 1993 tests show marked NCE gains in two out of three grades (first grade results are not included) and increases for the school as a whole. Brennan, which has shown achievement growth in all other subjects as well, is being nominated along with six other schools by the School District for the Chapter 1 National Recognition Program as an "unusually effective school."

At Holland, there is a similar pattern of results, but the gains are not as pronounced. The percentage of students making a grade of C or better in reading rose by 10 percent from 1990 to 1993 to an 80 percent level. While the percentage of students reading in a grade-level book declined by 4 percentage points to 55 percent, the

school's Informal Reading Inventory measure, developed by the school staff in a way which tends to reduce inflated scores, showed a dramatic gain from 24 percent reading at grade level or better to 43 percent (and nearly 60 percent the two previous years) during this period. The CTBS NCE scores showed a slight gain overall but a negative score for the fourth grade.

At Preston, the standardized test results in reading comprehension showed strong gains in the second and third grades but an equally significant loss in the fourth grade. Overall, there was a substantial increase of eighteen percentage points between 1990 and 1993 in the percentage of students reading grade-level books or higher. Similarly, report card marks of A, B, or C in reading increased by 7 percentage points to a level of 95 percent. However, the standardized test math results in Concepts and Applications showed losses in grades 2-4. Although citywide results demonstrated a similar pattern of decreasing scores at the same grade levels, the drops at Preston were substantially greater than citywide decreases in two of the three comparison grades.

At Wolcott, indicators of achievement are mixed. Report card marks of C or better in reading increased by 6 percentage points to 74 percent between 1990 and 1993 and grades improved by even greater percentages in all other subjects as well. The percentage of students schoolwide reading a grade-level book or better increased by three percentage points to 64 percent. The school's more refined measure of reading level, the MacMillan Informal Reading Inventory, also showed reading gains over the same time period in the second and third grades (from 29 percent to 41 percent and 28 percent to 34 percent respectively) but showed a decline for fourth grade (51 percent to 38 percent) and relative stability in the fifth grade (65 percent to 63 percent). The reading comprehension test scores of students who took the CTBS test in both 1992 and 1993 dropped in three of the four comparison grades: in two of those grades, the NCE score decreases were significantly greater than the citywide decline. The third grade gain was stronger than the citywide increase.

Teachers as well as parents at these schools were convinced that the curriculum reforms generated by or enhanced by the Cluster Initiative or Schoolwide Projects initiatives had sparked a greater love of learning in their students. Teachers spoke enthusiastically of students' increased interest in reading and writing. However, reliable and systematic evidence documenting these changes had not been collected. It is apparent that future evaluations of restructuring efforts such as the Cluster Initiative need to draw on detailed longitudinal observational research and more authentic assessments of student performance.

Achievement gains and losses for the three schools where Cluster Initiative activities had only a marginal impact or no impact are summarized in Tables 1-5 of Appendix D. The pattern of gains at Perry Middle School was most likely due to the impact of Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects initiatives as well as the creation of a house structure and perhaps other school improvement efforts such as the adoption of common planning time for teachers. There were gains reported on some measures for Nelson Middle School and Chamberlain School but substantial losses in achievement on on others. At Nelson, there was a 21 percent drop in the percentage of students reading at grade level since 1990 (measured by book level).

At Wilson, there was a similar but less pronounced drop (9 percentage points) in reading level over the same time period, marked decreases between 1992 and 1993 in NCE reading comprehension scores in three out of four grades, and even more significant drops in math in the same grades.

# *Ingredients of Success*

A key question guiding this study is why the Cluster Initiative achieved varying degrees of success at the seven schools. The four schools where the initiative was most effective had several conditions in common which facilitated the school renewal process:

1) **There was a history of reasonable staff collegiality and an absence of individuals or a core group of teachers whose behavior made consensus a virtual impossibility.** The teachers may not have focused previously on curriculum issues in a collective way, but their interactions were not marked by deep and bitter divisions.

2) **One or more teachers or administrators were willing to do the hard work to follow up on ideas and plans formulated at meetings**. Without the contribution of these skilled and committed staff members, the ideas would never have been executed. Not all schools had people willing to step forward and take on that kind of responsibility.

3) **The principal supported the initiative and helped smooth the way for its implementation.** This finding supports a substantial literature documenting the key role of the principal. In the one school where the principal and faculty were unable to work together, the initiative failed. In another, a succession of principals over the three year period hindered the full development of the initiative.

4) **Early on in the initiative, committees were established around specific tasks that involved almost every teacher in the school.** Whole school change occurred only where this kind of implementation structure existed to pull in all staff. In most cases, classroom assistants were included as well. In schools where only a core group worked on the initiative, the goal of school renewal was not achieved. It was also important that committee members were involved in planning how Cluster Initiative funds were to be spent. In schools where it was less successful, just the principal or a small group of faculty were included in the budgetary process.

5) **Schools whose staff had had previous involvement in PATHS/PRISM programs and who were eager to involve more of their colleagues in curriculum change were better able to take advantage of the initiative**. In each of the four schools where the initiative was a success, there were one or more faculty members with PATHS/PRISM experience who played critical roles in the change process. They were already part of citywide teacher networks, were sophisticated in their knowledge of curriculum and school reform strategies, and had developed a trusting working relationship with PATHS/PRISM staff.

6) **The combination of Chapter I Schoolwide Projects funds and the Cluster Initiative spurred change in three of the four schools where the effort was successful.** (The fourth school was ineligible for Chapter 1 funds.) The substantial sums of Schoolwide Projects money, ranging from $187,000 to $525,000, enabled

the schools to enhance their academic programs in a relatively flexible way. The Cluster Initiative funds, which were comparatively quite modest but which could be used even more flexibly, enabled teachers to come together to reflect, plan and re-think that academic program. In these three schools, there was an effort to coordinate the use of Schoolwide Projects dollars with the goals and strategies that emerged from the Cluster Initiative planning process. In the two schools where the initiative was only partially successful, there was little coordination of Schoolwide Projects efforts with the Cluster Initiative, and in the school where the initiative did not succeed, there were no Schoolwide Projects funds despite high levels of poverty and low achievement.

In three schools, there was an effort to coordinate the use of Schoolwide Projects dollars with the goals and strategies that emerged from the Cluster Initiative planning process

It is important to note here that the School District of Philadelphia is recognized nationally as a leader in the use of Schoolwide Projects funds for a range of school improvement initiatives.[10] District officials have worked to administer the funds in a way that promotes flexible site-based innovation to improve student outcomes. A variety of reforms have emerged from this effort, and it remains the largest single source of discretionary money available to the 116 eligible schools (almost half the schools in the district). Thus when schools garner smaller grants for schoolwide innovation such as through the Cluster Initiative, it is critical that these funds support staff planning and professional development which can steer the use of other, larger sums of discretionary funding such as those provided by Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects. As one teacher put it, "you have to have a *vision*, otherwise you can fritter it [the money] away."

Looking back at the results of the Cluster Initiative, it is apparent that genuine reform most often happens when several changes happen at once. At Brennan school, for example, the arrival of a new principal who was task-oriented, reform-minded, and participatory in leadership style coincided with the initiation of both Schoolwide Projects and the Cluster Initiative. The beginning of re-visioning at Perry Middle School came soon after the school had undergone the transition from a junior high school to a middle school (with houses), after a new principal had made staff changes and had tightened up discipline, and simultaneous with the beginning of Schoolwide Projects status. At Preston, the Cluster Initiative built on the school's long history of connections to local and national reform movements. It is probably more accurate to conceptualize school change, in the words of organizational analyst Carol Weiss, as "the result of a confluence of reform energies rather than a cause-and-effect sequence."[11]

# *PATHS/PRISM as External Change Agent*

During the life of the Cluster Initiative, PATHS/PRISM played the role of the external convener and facilitator of whole school change. Its previous work had centered on organizing and convening courses, workshops, colloquia, and curriculum development efforts with individual teachers or faculty teams from schools throughout the district. Consequently, the experience of working with staffs from a whole school represented a step into uncharted territory for PATHS/PRISM staff. Most of this work was done by the Director of School Programs at PATHS/PRISM with the assistance of two other staff members and support from staff at the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. The involvement of the teachers' union was especially critical in securing teachers' commitment to participate in the initiative and in working on the development of School-Based Management/Shared Decision-making governance. The effort was also coordinated with the School District's Office of Curriculum and Instructional Support and Office of School Operations.

In six of the seven Cluster Initiative schools, the faculty, administrators and parents interviewed for this study praised the work of the PATHS/PRISM change agent, in this case the Director of School Programs. In the early phases of the initiative, his work included facilitating meetings and retreats, arranging staff development sessions and site visits, providing schools with information on other grants and relevant research, and assisting staffs in preparing Educational Plans for school governance.

Those interviewed pointed to particular characteristics of the change agent's style that enabled him to work effectively in the schools: a non-threatening low-key approach, an ability to listen and then to synthesize people's ideas, and a breadth of knowledge about curriculum and organizational change. They also praised his respect for teachers and the challenges they face, the authenticity of his commitment to school change, his skill in following-up on plans and proposals, and his ability to keep a group focused on a task. The teachers and administrators contended that this constellation of traits was crucial to the program's effectiveness. Without this type of support, along with the other resources provided through PATHS/PRISM, they argued, the changes they experienced would most likely not have happened. These comments typify their assessments of PATHS/PRISM's technical assistance:

> *[The PATHS/PRISM staff member] was a guiding force for us ... He helped us focus and resolve issues and put things in words and make a coherent list. He was a spur when we got stuck. He would show us a new way to think about things ... He seemed like part of us and knew us; he was not like an outsider. (Teacher, Brennan School)*

> *I particularly connected with him and he doesn't even know it. He was helpful, organized and people here related to him. They got a sense of his commitment and connection. He's a big piece of why the thing worked. (Teacher, Holland School)*

*He was very important. He came at our request and never forced himself. He was a neutral person in the whole thing ... He served a very important function and presented things as an outsider ... He generated a lot of ideas and helped us stay focused. More than anything, having a person like him is very important for any school doing School-Based Management or other initiatives. (Principal, Wolcott School)*

Even at Nelson Middle School, where the initiative did not succeed, the faculty praised the assistance of the PATHS/PRISM staff. They blamed themselves for not making progress and noted that had the change agent intervened in a more forceful way, the whole point of teacher-driven change would have been defeated.

Only at Chamberlain, where the initiative met with limited success, were many of the faculty critical of the quality of PATHS/PRISM's assistance. The first-year plan submitted by the planning group at the end of year one called for a $20,000 expenditure on computers. PATHS/PRISM staff rejected the proposal on the grounds that it did not represent a consensus among the faculty and appeared to be an "add-on" program that was only peripherally related to the core of instruction. Several Chamberlain teachers were angered by this move (although others agreed with PATHS/PRISM's decision), which they attributed to poor communication and direction on PATHS/PRISM's part, but did not come up with an alternative plan the following fall. They regrouped the following spring with a proposal for the Friday afternoon elective period and then, later, for money for planning time to write an Educational Plan. Relations with PATHS/PRISM were never fully repaired after the original rejection of the computer proposal.

Those interviewed felt that the initiative would have failed had PATHS/PRISM come in with anything that hinted of a mandated "top-down" program

If faculty and administrators at all the schools had any criticism of PATHS/PRISM's technical assistance, it was that the Cluster Initiative did not provide the schools with enough guidance and direction. PATHS/PRISM tried to walk a very fine line between giving the staff at individual school sites a great deal of latitude in fashioning their own vision of school change while at the same time gently nudging them in certain directions. In the view of some school faculty, there were times when PATHS/PRISM staff should have been more forceful in making suggestions, in giving precise feedback to school proposals, and in warning schools to avoid an ill-fated path.

For the most part, however, those interviewed felt that the initiative would have failed had PATHS/PRISM come in with anything that hinted of a mandated "top-down" program. Again and again in the interviews, people stressed that the success of the Cluster Initiative was linked to the power it gave staffs at the individual school sites, including their influence over the pace as well as the content of change. The Director of School Programs at PATHS/PRISM believed that while the school groups should stay focused on a task, they should move at a pace that was appropriate for them. The principal at Brennan applauded his strategy:

*We would have gone further if he had been more directive but it would have been more threatening ... With experienced staffs, you can't tell them what to do. He gave us permission, including me, to take the time to change. I slowed down a lot. It takes time. People do not change overnight.*

In their own internal retrospective assessment, current PATHS/PRISM program officers and directors thought that the initiative could have been made stronger if more program officers had been assigned to work actively with the schools. In their view, too much responsibility fell on the shoulders of the Director of School Programs while other staff were underutilized. Also, they felt the organization could have benefited from more intense help from consultants who had a national perspective and extensive experience with whole school renewal efforts, especially at the middle school level. In its current whole school work, PATHS/PRISM has made much more of an effort to tap into national thinking and to draw on the expertise of consultants.

# *Summary and Conclusions*

The Cluster Initiative achieved its goals in four of the seven schools invited to participate in the effort. Demonstrable progress toward whole school renewal occurred at two other sites, but the initiative was derailed early on at another school. The philosophy guiding this endeavor—that whole school change should be focused on curriculum and instruction and should involve widespread participation of teachers at the school site—proved to be a sound one. Four schools emerged from this effort with re-energized common staff cultures able to think and work collectively to improve teaching and learning in their classrooms. Their involvement in the creation of a school-based participatory management structure aided their efforts at curriculum change in three schools but distracted from it at a fourth. The guidance provided by an outside facilitating organization with external funds, in this case PATHS/PRISM, was critical to the change process. The sums spent at the school sites were comparatively modest, but when coordinated with other discretionary sources of funds, notably Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects money, the impact was magnified.

The definition of success in this and other whole school change efforts, of course, must be interpreted cautiously. Few studies, including this one, use refined assessments to measure student achievement and engagement in learning. The degree of instructional innovation always varies from one classroom to the next, the content of the innovation can lead to losses rather than gains for certain groups of children, and reform efforts are often not sustained or developed further in subsequent years. As one PATHS/PRISM staffer put it, "almost all the good stuff that teachers do ... is constantly threatened by being sucked into the big nothing of status quo." Veteran faculty at nearly all of these schools, for example, could recall earlier periods of exciting innovative activity in their organizations' histories that subsequently waned.

Nevertheless, the significance of the change in collegial cultures which resulted from the Cluster Initiative should not be under-estimated. The task of revitalizing workplace climates is an enormously complex effort in any enterprise but is especially so in urban public schools. While the creation of urban school cultures that are "learning and doing communities" may not always result in enhanced student learning, it is a necessary pre-condition for such change.

# *Recommendations and Observations*

As the School District, PATHS/PRISM and other facilitating organizations move in the direction of whole school change in a more comprehensive way, the lessons of the Cluster Initiative are worth noting.

1) **School renewal and restructuring efforts must give faculties at school sites significant discretion over the content and process of such initiatives.** The collegial interaction required to develop these initiatives can create dynamic adaptive staff cultures that are characterized by reflection, dialogue and risk-taking. This cohesive and dynamic culture can generate the genuine staff *commitment* to change that is a precondition for actual classroom implementation.

2) **Intensive staff development programs focusing on curriculum and instruction for an entire school faculty or teams of faculty must be a centerpiece of whole school change initiatives.** Such efforts should be broadly defined to include creative adaptations and implementation of national, state, and local curriculum standards and assessments as they become available.[12]

3) **Schools moving toward systemic change need the help of external resources and facilitators**. The facilitator must be someone who is adept at moving staffs forward without seeming to be too intrusive. The change agent must also be skilled at running meetings, listening to staff and then synthesizing their ideas, presenting new frameworks for thinking, arranging professional development opportunities, and keeping people on task.

4) **Meaningful change in curriculum, instruction and governance should not be rushed.** An overly-hasty effort will be superficial and will not result in the sense of involvement that is necessary for school staffs to accept innovation.

5) **Attempts at schoolwide change must involve all faculty and administrators in a formal way in committees or task forces.** Middle schools in particular need help from outside facilitators to develop inclusive organizational structures that promote schoolwide reforms.

6) **Relatively small school renewal grants, together with technical assistance from an outside change agent, can be used effectively to generate site-based reform strategies that subsequently drive the use of larger discretionary funds such as Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects.** As individual schools rather than districts become eligible for further grants of discretionary funds, as currently envisioned in pending federal legislation, it is important that they engage in the kind of reflective broadbased planning process that characterized the Cluster Initiative effort. The schools' use of these more substantial funds will ultimately determine the scope and permanence of reform.

7) **Schools should reach a stage of collective sophistication that enables them to apply for new grants** that are appropriate to the vision and strategies they have set for themselves in order to sustain and deepen their change initiatives. In the case of PATHS/PRISM, new grant opportunities are often available that can enable these schools to move ahead.

8) **Schools need assistance in learning how to assess their needs and document change when it occurs.** The use of quantitative and qualitative data to plan, to evaluate the impact of changes, to fine-tune or jettison reforms, and to demonstrate success is an essential part of schoolwide reform.

9) **Schools marked by mistrust and bitter divisions between the faculty and principal should address this issue prior to undertaking a major renewal and restructuring effort with an outside facilitating organization.** Scarce school improvement resources should be targeted to sites where there is a reasonable chance that change efforts will bear fruit.

10) **The School District should commit itself to a personnel policy that keeps effective principals in place for at least five years in those schools undertaking major renewal efforts.** The rapid turnover of principals virtually precludes deep and lasting schoolwide change.

The Cluster Initiative, like many other efforts of its kind across the country, demonstrated that substantial change can happen "one school at a time." That these reforms have occurred in two of the poorest neighborhoods in the city of Philadelphia make the changes all the more significant. But as other researchers have noted, this kind of change is not usually replicated in neighboring schools.[13] The challenge now is to go the next step and link together schools in a common feeder pattern so that revitalization can occur at contiguous schools and reinforcement of student gains can extend from one level of schooling to the next. Organizations such as PATHS/PRISM must be part of a whole infrastructure of school improvement that enables groups of urban schools to embark on sustained coordinated efforts to make schools lively educational environments for those who teach and those who learn.

# *Case Study: Brennan Elementary School*

Brennan Elementary decided early on in the Cluster Initiative planning process to tailor its curriculum efforts to fit its multi-ethnic student body. Located in one of Philadelphia's poorest neighborhoods, the student population, which goes through fourth grade, is 26 percent Asian (mostly Vietnamese), 48 percent Caucasian, 22 percent Hispanic, and 4 percent African-American. Almost 95 percent of the 500 students reside in low income homes (including 71 percent receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children), the highest percentage of any of the schools in the Cluster Initiative. When faculty and other staff were encouraged by PATHS/PRISM to design their own school-change effort, an invitation viewed initially with disbelief and skepticism, they immediately identified the school's diversity as a strength that could provide a focal point for reform.

The school's staff engaged in an intensive planning and staff-development process, involving 100 percent of the faculty, in a series of meetings held over the summer and on Saturdays and after school during the school year 1990-91. The planning process has continued on through the years. They developed a school mission/vision statement, written into their Educational Plan, emphasizing multicultural awareness and the school as a learning community. The entire school, including the pre-school located there, adoped a literature-based thematic approach to social studies and developed curriculum frameworks for five units on major geographic/cultural regions. Customized staff development sessions enhanced the teachers' background knowledge of cultural groups and of whole language instruction and culminated in a staff trip to Ellis Island. Cluster Initiative funds paid for class sets of literature books for each unit. The inter-disciplinary cross-grade units and materials served three purposes: a) to increase students' awareness and tolerance of other cultural groups; b) to build whole language reading and language arts methods into the curriculum; and c) to teach social studies in a more interesting, thematic manner that stressed global education.

A significantly enhanced collegial culture and a more coherently taught curriculum emerged from the common planning effort. Virtually all staff have been involved in committee work, and they meet in common grade groups and content groups as well. Those interviewed for this study observed that the open-ended curriculum-change effort promoted by the Cluster Initiative, along with the arrival of a new principal whose style was both participatory and decisive, had unified the staff and re-vitalized the school environment. The comments of teachers and administrators on PATHS/PRISM questionnaires completed at the end of the 1990-91 school year as well as their responses during the interviews for this study express this perspective:

> *The Cluster Initiative had a real big impact. Almost every teacher uses trade books comfortably. The core group gets larger every year. One or two teachers get more involved each year and the leader corps gets bigger.*

*Some of us went to other PATHS/PRISM summer programs before but that brought about change just in our own classrooms, not the whole school being involved ... Now, every year we're building and seeing where to improve and that comes from meeting together.*

*We have focused on concepts together. Cultural diversity has become our focus which was not here before. Teachers sharing plans, books, ideas is more a part of the day ... I see a thread which runs through one activity to another which creates a concrete base and consistent feeling for students.*

*The initial units blossomed into other areas of study. For example, the books became starting points rather than the whole focal point of study.*

*The cultural awareness is felt and appreciated throughout the school. The activities in class, the art, music are just great.*

One of the more impressive results of the Cluster Initiative at Brennan is the way in which the staff has continually refined the thematic units. During retreats and meetings in June, 1992, the staff reworked the units to be "more complete, more interdisciplinary, and more sophisticated." They used topics such as "human needs" and "similarities and differences" to focus the units. Further revision took place a year later after the principal and three teachers visited three schools in Dade County, Florida, funded by a grant from the Pennsylvania Academy for the Profession of Teaching. Convinced from their observations that "less is more," they pared down the number of units and countries studied for 1993-94 in order for both students and teachers to have a less hectic and more intensive learning experience. A new unit on U.S. history was added as well. This revision will be evaluated at the end of the academic year.

Measures of student achievement on a variety of indicators, presented in the main body of this report, have shown improvement since the start of the Cluster Initiative. It is likely that the combined effect of the initiative along with the simultaneous arrival of a new principal and the initiation of Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects (approximately $500,000 annually) together accounted for these gains. Teachers comment that the curriculum changes have increased students' engagement in learning ("children are actually *excited* about learning different cultures") and have improved the quantity and quality of their written work. One of the mothers interviewed claimed that her second grade son does more reading and writing than her older daughter did when she was in that grade. When it comes to issues of ethnic stereotyping, staff make cautious claims that children are becoming more sensitive to and tolerant of other cultural groups. As one staff member put it, "more kids now say 'he is Vietnamese' rather than 'he is Chinese' if they have a fight."

Parent involvement in the school has increased as a result of the activities associated with the thematic units. Each unit has an opening and culminating

activity, often with an arts focus, that provides a natural draw for parents. Parents were enthused about an international food festival among other activities. The core of actively involved parents remains small, but there are now large turnouts for report card conferences and open houses.

The formation of a Governance Council appears to have boosted reform efforts and the school has attained full-fledged status as a School-Based Management/ Shared Decision-making school. On the whole, this process has been a productive one, although the overlap in responsibility of the Governance Council and Leadership Team (required by Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects) has not been satisfactorily resolved in the eyes of some staff members. Further, while faculty generally felt the process had been a positive one, some felt that the school would have had a participatory culture anyway even if the Governance Council had not existed.

A measure of the staff's growing sophistication is the way in which they have coordinated several initiatives

A measure of the staff's growing sophistication is the way in which they have coordinated several initiatives. The Educational Plan incorporates Cluster Initiative curriculum ideas. Funds from Schoolwide Projects have been used to pay for planning time to further Cluster Initiative instructional goals. The $10,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Academy for the Profession of Teaching was used to engage in further study of the global education units. Five staff members attended a two-week PATHS/PRISM summer program, Building the Foundations, that taught them how to use "descriptive reviews" that assess their students' strengths and weaknesses, a technique they now use in meetings of the Student Support Team. A smaller PATHS/PRISM grant to individual teachers was integrated with the curriculum work of the Cluster Initiative. As one teacher put it, "all the money is going in the same direction for a common goal." In thinking about the ways in which they have changed, those interviewed felt that the school had moved from the stage characterized by the Consortium on Chicago School Research as one of peripheral and unfocused academic initiatives to one approaching a systemic coordinated approach to school restructuring.

One of the factors accounting for the success of the Cluster Initiative at Brennan was the presence of a core of seven faculty who had already been active in previous PATHS/PRISM programs. The Cluster Initiative was a logical outgrowth of their previous activities which they were eager to extend to their colleagues. One faculty member had participated in three PATHS/PRISM summer workshops in American History that had focused on the cultural heritage of diverse groups in the city. Her developing interest in the cultures of the surrounding neighborhood, along with that of her co-teacher, led her to want to create school curricula around multicultural themes. When the Cluster Initiative opportunity presented itself, she was ready with ideas that were then picked up and developed by the whole staff. Another teacher, who had been active in five separate PATHS/PRISM programs prior to the beginning of the Cluster Initiative, played a key role in the development of the initiative at the school.

The momentum for change has continued at Brennan into the 1993-94 year. Buoyed by its new sense of itself, the school applied for and was accepted to participate in a three-year project of the Center for Urban Ethnography at the University of Pennsylvania which will involve research and documentation of

changes at the school and in the neighborhood. A $5000 grant from PATHS/ PRISM to continue work in school renewal will help extend reform activities as well. According to the principal, the Penn grant, which provides the services of an outside facilitator, will "keep the momentum going. Without that, we'd be in trouble." And in the spirited approach characterizing the school, she added, " We need someone nipping at our heels."

# *Case Study: Holland Elementary School*

As was the case at Brennan School, the staff at Holland School believed that the Cluster Initiative had played a critical role in moving the school from a stage of unfocused reform initiatives to one where change efforts were guided by a common vision. The faculty became skilled at linking activities from several external funding sources, including Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects, to meet goals they established as a result of Cluster Initiative planning. A school of more than 650 students in grades Kindergarten through fourth grade, Holland had a reputation prior to the initiative as a school with a collegial faculty, a supportive principal, and a friendly "family" atmosphere. However, by the spring of 1990, the teachers were alarmed at the low achievement levels and disciplinary problems of their students, nearly all of whom were from low income homes (about 90 percent) and were African-American (99 percent). The Cluster Initiative, along with work they had already begun through Schoolwide Projects, enabled them to discuss these issues openly and expand their repertoire of strategies to address them.

Once the initiative began at Holland, it moved ahead with astonishing rapidity. Indeed, this was the first elementary school in the District to go through all of the steps to become a School-Based Management/Shared Decision-making School. A major reason for the success of the effort, the principal and others noted, was the presence of a core of educational experts on the faculty who were willing to play leadership roles. One teacher in particular, who had had extensive experience in several PATHS/PRISM programs and who had been a "teacher consultant" with the Philadelphia Writing Project organized at the University of Pennsylvania, was a key player who, in the principal's word, "got us into it and kept us there." When several faculty questioned whether the school should join the Cluster Initiative because it might impose more work, she volunteered to do the work. The early minutes of meetings show a good deal of sophisticated brainstorming, an awareness of national school reform models (such as Reading Recovery and Success for All), and an ability to plan and delegate authority. Over the years, the leadership group expanded as it did in the other schools where the Cluster Initiative was successful.

The Cluster Initiative work at Holland took place in committees organized around three tasks: moving the school's reading and language arts curriculum toward whole language methods; increasing parent involvement; and developing workable and consistent student discipline policies. By the end of the first year of the Cluster Initiative's implementation, noteworthy progress had been made in all three of these areas, and the three themes continued throughout the life of the initiative.

In the area of reading and language arts, the school had already demonstrated an interest in whole language prior to the initiative by using Schoolwide Projects funds to buy classroom materials and to pay for a teacher-staffed Whole Language Lab. Cluster Initiative funds paid for further staff development in this area as well as the purchase of class sets of books, books for classroom libraries, and other curriculum materials. Members of this committee eschewed payment for their planning time in order to spend the money on the materials. A range of other reading-related activities were instituted: whole classes read to one another (book

buddies), parents were encouraged to borrow books to take home, and adult volunteers were recruited to read to the children in class. Throughout the initiative, teachers were given the option of continuing with a basal reader program, supplementing this approach with trade books and other whole language strategies, or moving fully into whole language teaching. (It should be noted that the whole language philosophy promoted at this school still includes an emphasis on phonics in the early grades.) By the end of 1993, the percentage of teachers using whole language approaches had grown from 33 percent to 55 percent of the staff.

The Parental Involvement Committee organized parent workshops, back to school nights, activities that increased the presence of adult males in school life, volunteer opportunities for parents and relatives, and its capstone event, Grandparents Day. The latter event, a festive occasion celebrating student work and relatives' support, has drawn between 250 and 300 relatives annually. Informal meetings between teachers and parents were encouraged as well. Holland made more direct and systematic efforts to increase family involvement than any of the other Cluster Initiative schools. A PATHS/PRISM staff member summarized the significance of this effort:

> *... What's interesting and special about Holland really isn't whatever it is they succeeded in with that [family involvement], it's the fact that they finally pushed past giving up. In other words, when I first encountered them, what Holland had to tell you about parent involvement was that once upon a time, like everywhere else, parent involvement had been pretty decent and that over the past decade it had sunk, and it was not good at all, and it was something they missed and something they knew the school would benefit from, but, everything had been tried, and nothing worked. What I will always remember from them is they ... finally pushed past that sense of things, they finally said to themselves, 'maybe it's time to try again' ...*

"What I will always remember from them is ...they finally said to themselves 'maybe it's time to try again' ..."

The Discipline Committee established a code of behavior using the slogan "Do the Right Thing." This code was sent home to parents in September of the school year and was widely posted around the schools. A set of incentives (ribbons, medals, luncheons, etc.) was established to reward good behavior for classes and individuals. Gym equipment was purchased to promote "socialized" activities at lunchtime recess, and special assemblies used entertainment and drama to reinforce pro-social values and behavior.

Three new committees were created during 1992-93. The Heuristic Mathematics Committee explored the use of manipulatives in learning math as well as increased emphasis on problem solving skills in line with the new NCTM national math standards. The Committee also worked on developing alternative assessments of mathematics performance, restructuring the scope and sequence of the math curriculum, and improving instruction in estimation and in integration of procedural and conceptual knowledge. An Alternative Assessment Committee,

funded separately by PATHS/PRISM as one of its pilots in Portfolio and Performance-Based Assessment, embedded performance-based assessments into new interdisciplinary thematic units in social studies. The Total Quality Improvement Committee (modeled on Total Quality Management precepts borrowed from industry), funded by a $10,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Academy for the Profession of Teaching and conducted in partnership with Cheyney University, focused on changing management techniques in such areas as tracking student absenteeism and improving communication among staff members.

Holland has extended its exploration of linking whole language, alternative assessment and thematic teaching through the vehicle of arts instruction

Participation in the Cluster Initiative spurred a wider group of faculty to take advantage of related training and grant opportunities during the period of the Cluster Initiative. Six teachers on the Reading/Whole Language Committee deepened their knowledge of whole language strategies by enrolling in the PATHS/PRISM-sponsored "Good Books for Great Kids" course at Cabrini College. Another team of six teachers participated in a two-week intensive summer workshop, "Building the Foundations," which led them to use the "descriptive review," a child-centered approach to learning and assessment, as a process at the school site to communicate among themselves about children's strengths and weaknesses. This institute also gave the three participating schools grants of $5000 for program materials. In addition, another team of six teachers enrolled in a program at Drexel University on mathematics teaching, which then resulted in the creation of the Heuristic Math Committee. A group of teachers interested in Total Quality Improvement completed a course at Delaware County Community College and then followed up on those ideas through the Total Quality Improvement Committee.

The school has extended its exploration of linking whole language, alternative assessment and thematic teaching through the vehicle of arts instruction. Following up on the work of two smaller PATHS/PRISM grants in the arts (Artists at Work and Patterns and Symbols in Culture), Holland joined eight other Philadelphia schools in 1993 as a participant in Arts Empower, a three-year William Penn Foundation initiative funded through PATHS/PRISM that seeks to further whole school renewal through arts education. The work plan developed at Holland builds on Cluster Initiative activities by integrating the study of textiles and cultures with the thematic units on Africa and Native Americans. The literature and writing experiences and the parent involvement nurtured by the Cluster Initiative and Schoolwide Projects are also being folded into the classroom activities of these units. Performance assessment tools will be piloted in this project as well. Thus, Holland continues to invigorate its school improvement efforts with new grants that augment and re-focus earlier initiatives.

All of this work has created a professionalized collegial culture at the school. Staff members put it this way:

> *In the past, we squirreled away sets of books. Now we share and we talk more to each other. Class sets of books are moved around ... Also, in making contacts, we learned more about what was available in grants from PATHS/PRISM such as Building the Foundations, Good Books for Great Kids, and Arts Empower. We learned how to apply for these things.*

*We always had grade group meetings before. Now they are project-focused and not just gripe sessions or venting. Now they are more professionally based.*

*The Cluster Initiative gave us some direction based on our needs rather than the availability of funds and programs from the outside ... It identified to us areas of importance such as discipline and parent involvement ... The biggest thing was more communication. It was a vehicle for real discussion on specific topics that were unaddressed before.*

A discordant note was introduced in April, 1993, however when the School District asked schools to vote on implementation of budget cuts. Although the PFT requested that school staffs not vote on the issue, some of the Holland staff as well as the Governance Council followed through on the District's request. The debate and vote on which positions and programs to eliminate fell along the fault lines of curriculum philosophy and position (with classroom assistants voting as a bloc) and had a predictably divisive effect. As one teacher commented, "everything was wonderful until last April." A compromise forged later by a teacher on the school's Leadership Team has helped heal the divisions but the enthusiasm of many teachers for school-based management and shared decision-making has waned.

Teachers feel that the overall impact of the Cluster Initiative has had a positive effect on student achievement. While one measure of reading achievement shows a dramatic jump between 1990 and 1993 in the percentage of children reading at grade level (24 percent to 43 percent), other achievement indicators show modest but inconsistent gains. Teachers argue that real improvement has taken place:

*I haven't had a really bad class in a long time ... They can read fairly well and write in sentences ... They are a heterogeneous group and come in [to second grade] with skills ... [Due to whole language] I have some kids who can't read well but can write fairly well.*

*There is a tremendous difference in writing and reading ... Children enjoy books more and write in sentences.*

*The students are more eager to read and are spending more time on reading. I don't know how to prove it. [Part of the problem with standardized test scores] is the tremendous turnover among students. I have 30 students and at least two-thirds of them changed schools during a one-year period ... I just picked my best student in math for an award which is given every few weeks. I picked her on Monday and she was gone by Friday and she didn't even realize she was moving.*

*It's hard to document kids liking school. The kids just love coming to school.*

There is some evidence that gains made at Holland may erode as students move on to fifth grade at Nelson Middle School

There is some evidence that gains made at this school may erode as students move on to fifth grade at Nelson Middle School. At Nelson, serious discipline problems and achievement declines are apparent, a situation not lost on parents. Although the fifth graders at Nelson come only from Holland (other elementary schools feed into this middle school at the sixth grade level), there has been minimal effort to develop coordinated policies between the two schools. Future work to link curriculum, discipline, and parent involvement could improve the articulation process and subsequent student outcomes.

Overall, the prodigious effort put forth by the staff and parents at this school over the life of the Cluster Initiative has left its mark. The staff felt that the school's reform efforts had moved them to a point close to "sustained systemic activity" which, according to the Consortium on Chicago School Research, means that committed, united and re-trained faculty had implemented changes affecting most of the classrooms in the school. One mother on the Governance Council summarized the impact of the initiative: "People didn't know about us before. Now all of a sudden we are on the map and other schools want to come and visit us."

# *Case Study: Perry Middle School*

The Cluster Initiative was only one among many school renewal initiatives at Perry Middle School during the last few years. It did not play a central role in the school change process, but, in the words of its former principal, it was a "stepping stone" to enhanced faculty cohesiveness and greater focus on student learning. A complete plan for use of the money was never submitted to PATH/PRISM with the result that the school spent only 35 percent of the funds available to it through the initiative. Nevertheless, a disparate set of activities sparked greater dialogue among faculty, encouraged them to expand their horizons for change, and led to their involvement in other school improvement grants.

By all accounts, the school's climate improved radically beginning in 1988-89 after it reorganized from a junior high structure to a middle school with houses. A new principal arrived at the same time who established greater student discipline, engineered changes in staffing, encouraged greater faculty discussion of academic issues, and pushed a "middle school philosophy" that included the decentralized house structure and common planning time for teachers. The Cluster Initiative thus began at a moment when the school was ready to take on renewal work focused on curriculum and instruction. The designation of the school as a Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects school beginning in 1991-92 provided critical support and funds ($525,000 for 1993-94) for continued school improvement.

Like Brennan School, the multi-ethnic nature of the student body at Perry prompted the faculty to settle on a multi-cultural theme for its Cluster Initiative curriculum work. A little over half (56.4 percent) of the school's 1100 students (in grades 5-8) are Caucasian, 28.7 percent are of Hispanic origin, and the rest are about evenly divided between Asian-Americans (6.3 percent) and African-Americans (8.3 percent). Approximately 90 percent are from low income homes. The initiative got off to a promising start with a series of staff planning meetings in the spring, summer, and fall of 1990. By November, 1990, several dozen faculty, with the support of PATHS/PRISM, had worked on a substantial grant proposal to the RJR Nabisco Foundation to fund work on a reconfigured house structure stressing thematic learning around either the Humanities, Performing Arts, or Engineering/ Science/Technology.

Although the RJR Nabisco proposal was not funded, one of its key ideas, notably the development of thematic interdisciplinary multi-cultural units, became the centerpiece of the school's work with PATHS/PRISM. Movement toward the development of such units along with other reform ideas were discussed at several Cluster Initiative-funded gatherings. The initiative also paid for 23 staff members to attend the annual meeting of the National Middle Schools Association in early 1992. One faculty member took seriously the Cluster Initiative's original charge to work with other schools in the feeder pattern and developed a cross-age tutoring project and literature program with an elementary school.

While planning sessions generated a wealth of creative intentions, the staff was not skilled at following up on planning. Two years after the Cluster Initiative began, PATHS/PRISM staff urged the faculty to focus their ideas and come up with a

workable plan. These conceptions were partially brought to fruition only through subsequent PATHS/PRISM grants, Caught Between Two Worlds and Crossing the Boundaries, which were begun in 1991 and 1992 respectively. In those initiatives, a small group of faculty developed several thematic units, one of which was taught in an entire house, but neither effort brought about schoolwide change.

The loose implementation structure of the Cluster Initiative at Perry helped account for its failure to be fully carried out. There was no committee structure established to act on the ideas that were generated. A relatively small number of the school's more than 70 faculty were involved in the initiative. Looking back, of the twelve people from Perry interviewed for this study, most had only hazy recollections of what had happened to the Cluster Initiative and had trouble distinguishing its work from that of the other two PATHS/PRISM grants. Accounts of the initiative's history differed from one person to the next. No one but the former principal and PATHS/PRISM staff had been involved in making decisions about expenditures from the its budget. Implementation was also undercut by the fact that there were three different principals in the school during the life of the initiative.

With regard to the governance side of the initiative, Perry initially filed a Letter of Intent to pursue School-Based Management/Shared Decision-making, but early on a decision was made not to proceed with the creation of a Governance Council. The principal and staff seemed content with the formation of an inclusive Leadership Team, required by Schoolwide Projects, and treated that body as a quasi-Governance Council. That group now meets weekly, under the leadership of the Acting Principal, and engages in wide-ranging discussion of school issues. It includes house directors, program support teachers from the main curriculum content areas, the head of the Home and School Association, the head of the PFT Building Committee, and the school-community coordinator. There appears to be little interest in moving toward the creation of a Governance Council and full status as a site-based managed school. According to one teacher, that would happen only if a new principal were appointed who was strongly committed to that form of governance.

The open-ended non-directive approach that worked so well in elementary schools was less effective at the middle school level

PATHS/PRISM's inexperience in working on middle school restructuring and renewal partially explains the incomplete implementation of the Cluster Initiative at Perry. At that time in its history, the staff did not fully appreciate the complex organizational nature of middle schools, and it did not do enough to tap the expertise of consultants who were knowledgeable in this field. Perry clearly needed more direct advice on how to set up a committee or task force structure that would work in a setting where there were house structures, discipline-based groupings, and the differing orientations of elementary versus secondary teachers. They also needed the help of consultants on the writing of interdisciplinary thematic units, a task which turned out to be much more time-consuming than they had originally anticipated. The open-ended non-directive approach that worked so well in elementary schools was less effective at the middle school level.

Despite all this, however, those interviewed for this study argued that the Cluster Initiative had positive effects at the school. While it certainly did not transform the faculty culture or the curriculum, it did play a role in raising faculty morale because it gave them more control over the curriculum. The message of the initiative, in one teachers' words, was "You are a professional. You can think for yourselves. You have your own ideas."

Another teacher expressed similar ideas:

> *Teachers were uncomfortable at first because they were not accustomed to being asked what would help the students learn. Once teachers realized that PATHS/PRISM was interested in their ideas and experience, things moved along. It was a new way to be treated.*

Several of those interviewed talked about how the faculty's vision of change was enlarged as a result of the gatherings funded by the Cluster Initiative. "At first they just wanted supplies and didn't look at their practice," noted one teacher. Others commented that divisions among faculty along race, gender, social class, age, and grade-level lines began to break down during planning sessions and meetings, and claimed that a new camaraderie developed among staff who attended the National Middle Schools Association meeting. One faculty member asserted that the Cluster Initiative "helped steer us in the right direction." The majority of those interviewed felt that the school had moved from a stage of unfocused school reform efforts to a stage of "emergent restructuring" since 1990 partly because of the Cluster Initiative and subsequent PATHS/PRISM grants. Some believed, however, that the school was still close to a stage of having many uncoordinated initiatives (a "Christmas Tree" school in the words of the Consortium on Chicago School Research) with "lots of people doing lots of good things" and was not yet in a "restructured" mode.

In the words of one teacher, "we're not going back; we're inching ahead"

The influence of many other programs at the school, especially Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects, along with the organizational changes already mentioned, probably account for the progress that has been made in student achievement since 1990. Grades and attendance are up and the percentage of students reading at grade level (based on the Stanford Diagnostic Evaluation test) has increased although standardized test scores show inconsistent results. The school's improvement efforts, however, have been slowed by administrative turnover and the District's practice of moving some teachers from school to school (a process called "leveling") many weeks after the fall term has begun.

The faculty at Perry are continuing their efforts at schoolwide renewal through the Crossing the Boundaries initiative with PATHS/PRISM. They are adept at finding ways through this program and others to come together for common planning and reflection. The momentum for change continues although a well-organized systemic effort eludes them for the moment. In the words of one teacher, "we're not going back; we're inching ahead."

# *Case Study: Preston Elementary School*

Preston School entered the Cluster Initiative at a much more advanced stage of school improvement than the other schools included in the effort. Even so, the Cluster Initiative raised its educational reform efforts to a new level. Opened in the 1960s near the campus of the University of Pennsylvania, the school's population from the beginning included many liberal well-educated parents who wanted their children to attend a reform-minded, racially integrated urban school. In the early 1970s, some of the school's classrooms (one per grade) adopted an "open classroom" instructional approach drawn from the British Infant School model that departed from the traditional teacher-centered form of direct instruction. At that time, teachers could be tested and certified as "open classroom" teachers by the School District and the school made a point of hiring a certain number of teachers with those qualifications.

Although the certification of "open classroom" teachers ended in the mid-1970s, the school continued to maintain a diversity of instructional approaches at each grade level. Preston has dropped the formal designation of classes as "open" or "traditional" since both types of teachers have become more alike in their teaching styles over the years. But differences in instructional style remain significant enough that both staff and parents refer to classrooms and teachers by those terms. The school, then, has a history of sustained focus on issues of classroom teaching and learning. Over the years, it has developed many connections to other institutions, including PATHS/PRISM, as it re-examines its program and resources.

The school serves a heterogeneous student population. Nearly half of the students are from low income homes but many others are from middle and upper-middle class families. Of the 270 students, about two-thirds are African-American, a little over one quarter are Caucasian, about 6 percent are Asian-Americans, and the rest are from Hispanic backgrounds. Standardized test scores approximate national norms. By Philadelphia standards, the school is small, serving grades K-4, with two teachers per grade level.

PATHS/PRISM's support for continued innovation at the school began in 1984 with a grant to a group of teachers on "Literature of Different Cultures" which led to a similar grant the following year and to two other collaborative grants in 1986-87 on "Children Write About Their World" and "The Afro-American Experience." Five other grants to individual teachers were also awarded to Preston faculty in the late 1980s. In addition, five teachers were "science kit leaders" at the school (another PATHS/PRISM program) and two were Teacher-Consultants to the School District through the Philadelphia Writing Project, a program which has received partial funding from PATHS/PRISM. In short, as one teacher put it, the flourishing of the Cluster Initiative after its beginning in 1990 was "seeded by the earlier work" with PATHS/PRISM.

Several of these earlier grants led to the development of interdisciplinary thematic units on China, Greece, and Africa. Work on these units brought together teachers from both "open" and "traditional" classrooms. When the Cluster Initiative began, faculty saw the funds as a resource to provide for more planning time, staff development, materials, and the hiring of creative artists to enrich and deepen the

thematic units. In the words of one teacher, such units can become "thin and static" without re-invigoration and thus the infusion of resources from the Cluster Initiative was crucial to keeping them "dynamic and alive." A committee which met regularly over the three-year period was formed to oversee the extension of these units. The parents and teachers interviewed for this study all agreed that these 6-8 week units were (and remain) a highlight of the year and involved all teachers and many families. Substantial anthologies of children's written work, partially funded by the Cluster Initiative, were produced and sent to every home.

A second committee was formed to re-evaluate instruction in mathematics with the aim of furthering students' conceptual grasp of the discipline. An effort was made to bring math instruction into line with the new math standards outlined by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) in 1989. The committee used Cluster Initiative money for planning, for staff development, for video taping one another's classrooms, for ordering a professional library of math methods books, and for the purchase of class sets of math manipulatives for all classrooms. Spin-offs of this effort included increased teacher involvement in professional mathematics conferences and the attendance of three teachers at a math summer workshop funded by an Eisenhower grant through PATHS/PRISM.

A third committee, which functioned for two years, was called the Process Committee, and its charge was to oversee the shift to School-Based Management/ Shared Decision-making, to facilitate communication among teachers, parents, and the administration, to coordinate all externally-funded initiatives at the school and all Cluster Initiative committee work, to be the formal liaison group to PATHS/PRISM, and to provide oversight over the Cluster Initiative budget.

From the beginning, the Preston staff was highly sophisticated in its approach to both the content and process of schoolwide change. The early transcripts of their group meetings and focus groups demonstrated their acquaintance with national curriculum trends. For example, at one of their first meetings, they decided to build Howard Gardner's notion of "multiple intelligences" into their thematic units so that students would learn in ways that went beyond traditional measures of academic competence. Their approach to learning new teaching philosophies and methods was thoughtful and unrushed: an early memo, for example, suggested they "act as scholars" by spending the first year thinking about how children learn math. Their interest in authentic assessment led them to become an alternative assessment pilot site for the District.

The staff's organizational skills were superb. The formation of a Process Committee evidenced their understanding of the key role of communication and coordination in a schoolwide effort. They were proficient at running meetings, structuring a committee system that included all staff, creating budgets, writing reports, applying for grants, forming partnerships with other institutions, and, above all, following up on ideas generated at meetings. Many teachers as well as the librarian ("the glue who holds this school together") assumed leadership roles in the initiative. As one teacher put it, "people took charge of their little piece." The strength of the staff helps explain why the school has persisted in maintaining and enhancing content-based curricular initiatives over a long period of time despite changes in administrative leadership, teaching personnel, grade configurations (moving from a K-6 school to a K-4 school) and the demographic make-up of the school.

A more cohesive staff culture emerged from these activities. Work on mathematics and the thematic units cut across classroom philosophies and other differences that were potentially divisive. Teachers commented on the change wrought by the initiative:

> *It's marvelous. What happens in a school is you are isolated all day. When the whole school has a focus, you begin to talk about what worked. It makes such a big difference and it makes you less judgmental. When both teachers study Greek myths and see children's work, it's a wonderful way to learn how to respect each other and share and grow.*

> *The Cluster Initiative helped extend the idea of the earlier collaborative grants to the whole school ... It broadened and deepened [the thematic units] and allowed new people to build up what they were doing in the classroom.*

> *The whole faculty got involved with the Cluster Initiative. I got much more involved with planning. This one got everybody going and it provided a way for structure and planning.*

A teacher-directed approach to curriculum change worked well at a school such as this where the faculty were skilled at generating and executing new approaches to learning

Faculty are buoyed by what they see as students' increased enthusiasm for learning when studying the thematic units and their firmer grasp of math concepts as a result of the use of math manipulatives and problem solving strategies. Students' grades are high (95 percent get a C or better grade in reading and math) and the percentage reading at grade level, 86 percent, has jumped by 18 percent since 1990. While standardized test scores show NCE gains in two out of three grades in reading comprehension between 1992 and 1993, math scores in concepts and applications showed losses in those same grades (grades 2-4).

A Governance Council is functioning in the school and the draft of an Educational Plan is being readied for a vote by the faculty. However, many faculty feel the time consumed in the movement toward School-Based Management/Shared Decision-making had not been a worthwhile expenditure of energy. They felt that this work took away from time they might have devoted to curriculum matters, and that the school already had a degree of autonomy from the Central Office. As a small school with only ten faculty, several argued that the Governance Council structure was not needed. A few were angry that the District was forcing a particular governance structure on them that, in the end, would not give them real power anyway.

On the other hand, the two parents who were interviewed as well as one teacher argued that the Governance Council was a useful forum for dealing with the tensions associated with the differing curriculum philosophies at the school. Another teacher resented the time that had been devoted to the process but liked the way it had brought parents into decision-making in a formal way. Several people commented that PATHS/PRISM should have given them more help in writing their Educational Plan.

Overall, the Cluster Initiative provided a critical boost to Preston's ongoing school renewal efforts. PATHS/PRISM's teacher-directed approach to curriculum change worked well at a school such as this where the faculty were skilled at generating and executing new approaches to learning. Some observers wondered why such a well-functioning school was chosen to participate in the Cluster Initiative. The answer lies in the reality that even effective schools need the periodic infusion of new ideas and resources if they are to sustain their collective energy and direction.

# *Case Study: Nelson Middle School*

The Cluster Initiative got off to a promising start at Nelson Middle School but within a year efforts at schoolwide change had collapsed. The initiative was briefly resuscitated in the spring of 1991, but ended altogether soon thereafter. In all, only $6300 of the $45,000 (14 percent) available to the school through the Cluster Initiative was spent, with most of the money paying for staff planning time in the early months of the initiative. The mistrust that pervaded relations between the principal and the teachers and the divisions among the faculty themselves precluded progress at that stage in the school's history. The school, however, is now at a point where a schoolwide renewal program might make a dramatic difference: a new energetic and change-oriented administrative team has assumed office and a group of new teachers along with a core of veteran teachers are interested in revitalizing the school's instructional environment.

In recent years, Nelson's reputation had become one of a chaotic inner city school whose 800 member student body in grades 5 through 8 was segregated (98 percent African American) and low income (85.5 percent). When the new principal arrived in 1993, he found a school with a high rate of student suspensions (over 600 suspension incidents in the previous year), a faculty absenteeism rate of 7.8 percent that was almost double that of the 4.1 percent citywide rate, an inactive Home and School Association and Governance Council, a deeply divided instructional staff, and a run-down physical plant that was strewn with trash and scarred by graffiti. Only 32 percent of the students were reading at or above grade level, a percentage that had dropped by an alarming 21 points since 1990. Many of those interviewed attributed this sorry state of affairs to the fact that the school had had five principals during the last five years.

In the spring of 1990, 32 of Nelson's staff turned out for the kickoff Cluster Initiative retreat. Transcripts and minutes of their initial meetings in the spring and summer of 1990 show that the teachers and other staff generated a number of creative ideas as possible activities for the initiative. They settled on three themes and divided into three committees: one worked on developing a career-orientation for the middle school that would connect the school to local employers; another planned to work on an interdisciplinary, thematic multi-cultural curriculum; and a third committee, "staff strategies," was to focus on improving staff teamwork and communication. The record shows that the staff pursued only the career-oriented middle school goal and that effort lasted just a few months into the school year. A core of 2 to 5 people worked energetically but, in the end, this small group could not sustain the labor by itself. There was an attempt to revive the effort soon after another Cluster Initiative-wide retreat in April, 1991, but that was short lived.

Transcripts of the staff's discussion at that 1991 retreat reveal their discouragement at progress on the initiative. Their list of barriers to progress included low staff commitment to the effort, the problem of divisions among the teachers by grade level, department, and teaching styles, lack of trust, and the existence of a demoralized and sometimes cynical staff.

Similar sentiments were expressed on an end-of-year questionnaire circulated by PATHS/PRISM:

> *The main obstacle is the staff's lack of interest. Less than 20 percent have participated.*
>
> *Too many of the faculty do not want to have anything to do with PATHS/PRISM ... I can't think of a way to motivate them.*
>
> *The funds and their allocation were well-kept secrets.*
>
> *The obstacle has been the administration's attempt to control the process.*

Information from interviews for this study with fourteen people associated with the Cluster Initiative or with the school point to the conflict between the principal (who was there for most of the period of the initiative) and the faculty as the chief barrier to its implementation at Nelson. As one faculty member put it, "the interest was there but morale was so low no one could find the energy to put into anything new." Most of those interviewed also agreed that the deep divisions within the faculty played a role as well. One PATHS/PRISM staffer described it this way:

> *There were fractures all over the place ... The faculty of all the [Cluster Initiative] schools seemed to embody cliques and groups but it was much more visible and obtrusive at Nelson than the others ... It was amazing what their ideas were at first but what they could not seem to do was to use the excitement to help them push past some of the obstacles ... They just came circling back.*

These same fissures undermined the effectiveness of the Governance Council which was established after the school filed a Letter of Intent in November, 1990, to become a School-Based Management/Shared Decision-making school. The Council stopped meeting at some point during the 1992-93 school year, in part because of administrative turnover, and it is unclear at this point whether the school will choose to resume its efforts in that direction. There are no other governance bodies now except a small principal's cabinet.

Given the conditions which existed at the school, it is unlikely that PATHS/PRISM could have done anything to revive the initiative. Even work in team building would have failed in the context of so much mistrust. The staff did not blame PATHS/PRISM for the lack of follow-through on the initiative and, indeed, praised its efforts to move things along. Fortunately, the funding mechanism was such that little money was wasted. Without a viable plan, further funding after the initial round of planning meetings was not forthcoming. PFT and PATHS/PRISM staff who were interviewed noted that at the time schools were selected for

participation in the initiative, there was disagreement among them and School District officials about whether Nelson should be included. In retrospect, it was a mistake to have chosen a school where there was virtually no chance of success. PATHS/PRISM learned from this experience th.. it is quite a different matter to attempt schoolwide renewal with an organization that is deeply and bitterly divided than one that is merely de-energized.

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The fact that several staff members there had been involved in earlier PATHS/PRISM grants and workshops did not enhance the effort's success, in part because, in the view of some teachers, these staff were protective of their work and did not seem interested in disseminating their ideas to other faculty. This situation is quite different from that found at other Cluster Initiative schools where those already active with PATHS/PRISM were eager to reach out to others in their building.

Perhaps the faculty at Nelson did gain something from the initiative. Some of them, in looking back on their experience, became much more aware of their failure to communicate and their need to develop group process skills. Both PFT and PATHS/PRISM staff believed that this was a positive outcome:

> *By trying and failing it's almost as if for the first time they could look in the mirror and see something wrong ... The staff needs to realize they are not making it as a staff. They comprehended their lack of success. How many schools have a similar situation but no cognizance of it?*
>
> *They learned this about themselves—that the focus had to be on the student, not them, and that they had communication problems.*

As of the 1993-94 academic year, the school has begun serious school improvement efforts. A new principal and assistant principal have been appointed and, over the last two years, a number of veteran teachers have been replaced by new faculty. The trash and graffiti are gone, the physical plant is cleaner and cheerier, and a program of building repairs has been undertaken. The number of suspensions has been drastically reduced (only 68 as of December), a Home and School Association has been revived, a Parent Welcome Center has been opened, parental involvement has increased, meetings with other schools in the feeder pattern have begun, and average daily student attendance has jumped 5 percentage points to 88 percent. The two parents interviewed for this study were pleased by the changes. The feeling of many was summarized by one staffer that "conditions now are 100 percent better but they need to be 900 percent better." New faculty are more optimistic than veterans, many of whom have adopted a "wait and see" attitude toward the new principal.

Those interviewed agreed that the school has now reached a school improvement stage dubbed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research as "environmental order." More ambitious plans for team teaching and thematic learning are in the works and, if implemented, would move the school to a more advanced level of effectiveness. It now seems that an infusion of outside help and

resources resembling the Cluster Initiative would be of significant assistance to a school in this transition state. One teacher who was a key figure in Cluster Initiative activities at the school argues that at this point there would be a positive response from faculty to activities such as retreats and planning meetings. In her words, "there are things now we *know* we want."

# *Case Study: Wolcott Elementary School*

When the Cluster Initiative began in the spring of 1990, the Wolcott School staff described themselves in a self-portrait as "working hard against tremendous odds" with a desire for "a real chance to be colleagues." The Cluster Initiative gave them that chance. In their Educational Plan submitted almost three years later to the School District for approval as a site-based managed school, they cited the Cluster Initiative as the stimulus which led to their "desertion of tradition" in a thorough-going school renewal program. This effort was aided by the support of the school's two principals, the presence of a cadre of teacher leaders, and the simultaneous infusion of funds from Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects. The systemic change which appears to have taken place at the school was also boosted by the staff's conscious coordination of the Cluster Initiative and Schoolwide Projects from the outset.

As the staff began its planning for initiative activities, their chief concern was addressing the low achievement levels of the school's 550 students in grades K-5, 91 percent of whom were from low income homes. The school serves a mostly-Caucasian population (67.6 percent) and has representation as well from Hispanic students (16.8 percent), African-American students (11.9 percent), and Asian-American pupils (3.4 percent). Within two months of the kickoff retreat, faculty and other staff reached consensus on four goals: a literature-centered whole language approach to teaching reading, a schoolwide thematic social studies curriculum stressing the history of the school's neighborhood, a "school without failure" that experimented with an ungraded structure, and the development of new alternative assessment tools. These four goals have been the focus of activity over the life of the initiative and remain central to the staff's current educational reform efforts. In addition, an ongoing committee, Communication, Climate and Cooperation, oversaw the coordination of the efforts of the different committees and created incentives for improved student attendance and achievement and increased parent involvement.

All four objectives have been implemented to varying degrees, particularly the adoption of whole language strategies and the inter-disciplinary neighborhood history project which stressed research and "hands-on" learning. The move to whole language was facilitated early in the initiative by the participation of 10 teachers in a graduate-level seminar taught at the school site under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania's Literacy Network with partial funding from PATHS/PRISM.

The neighborhood history project played a key role in bringing the whole staff together as they learned about the area through Cluster Initiative-funded speakers and created curricular ideas and materials. The staff and parents interviewed for this study were unanimous in their praise for the way in which the project had enlivened the teaching of social studies, tied into literature-based instruction, and strengthened ties to the community and to families. Fourth and fifth graders took a trip to Ellis Island as the culminating activity of the study in one year, an activity paid for by Cluster Initiative funds. Wolcott is now enriching this project through its participation in Arts Empower, a three-year school renewal effort of the William Penn Foundation and PATHS/PRISM. The infusion of a new perspective and materials provides the boost that is needed to keep up faculty and student engagement in the history project.

Wolcott became one of the School District's pilot schools in Portfolio and Performance-Based Assessment and thus is continuing its work in that area in an even more intensive way. The staff has developed an alternative report card that de-emphasizes letter grades and provides more detailed accounting of students' work. Progress on an ungraded structure has been slower but six of the first and second grade teachers now stay with a group of children for two years. Weekly grade group meetings have been institutionalized with the support of Schoolwide Projects funds.

Wolcott staff eventually came to see the Governance Council as the facilitator and coordinator of the school's curriculum-renewal efforts

The journey to becoming a site-based managed school was a relatively smooth one at Wolcott. Although the writers of the Educational Plan, approved by the School District in early 1993, claimed that the process was "initially a distraction" from the school's curriculum-renewal efforts, eventually they came to see the Governance Council as the facilitator and coordinator of those initiatives. They drew a schematic diagram showing how the Governance Council would coordinate the "spirit" and resources coming out of the Cluster Initiative with the materials, personnel, and program structure delivered by Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects. Planning and coordination of these programs has continued with retreats and further staff development activities. Faculty were pleased that they could interview candidates for the principalship when a long-time principal retired. When the School District asked the Governance Council to vote on budget cuts in the spring of 1993, they refused to do so because they believed it would be a blow to the collegiality which had developed over the previous three years.

More than any other school in the Cluster Initiative, the staff at Wolcott exhibit an almost-unrestrained pride and enthusiasm for the way in which they have come together as an interactive learning community. They ranked themselves higher than did the staffs of the other schools on the school improvement classification scheme developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, describing themselves as having attained a stage of "sustained systemic activity."

This enthusiasm was evident in the interviews, in a day-long observation of a staff meeting, and in questionnaires filled out on two separate occasions (in sets of 36 and 28) during the years of the Cluster Initiative. They see themselves as having instituted a program of coherent change in curriculum and instruction that has affected practices in every classroom in the school. Further, they feel that they are able collectively to articulate new concerns, such as the low level of students' mathematics achievement, and seek outside help (in this case from the School District) to attack the problem. Comments from the interviews and questionnaires illustrate their feelings about the changes wrought by the Cluster Initiative:

> *What's wonderful is that [the change effort] has moved out from a small circle of teachers ... People worked socially well together in the past but didn't work professionally well together.*

> *It's made all the difference. It has given us the gift of time to sit and meet with each other. We came up with creative solutions and ideas and PATHS/PRISM was able to provide us with people who have experience and know-how.*

*The most exciting aspect has been the enthusiasm and interest of staff members. We seem to have been "re-charged" with a desire to improve our program while involving all staff, all children and the community.*

*As a "roving teacher," I saw many evidences of instructional change—whole language, more active learning, and doing history rather than studying history.*

*Before the Cluster Initiative, I never talked to the other second grade teachers ... I had no idea what they were doing. We now have a grade group meeting once a week and get good ideas from each other ... I love it. My fellow teachers are doing some great things and we can divide up the work.*

Several factors account for the initiative's success at the school. Both principals were enthusiastic supporters and facilitators of the renewal effort. They were aided by a capable group of teacher leaders who were willing to put in long hours to follow through on specific projects. One of these teachers had had previous involvement in PATHS/PRISM programs and provided a crucial link to outside experts and other resources. Her presence was vital in launching and sustaining the initiative. (Interestingly, unlike Preston, Brennan and Holland schools, no other teachers at the school had a previous history of involvement with PATHS/PRISM.) From the outset, the staff demonstrated skill at coordinating initiatives and eliciting schoolwide participation on committees. Finally, there was a fortuitous mix of personalities. In one teacher's words, there was "good chemistry" among the teachers with "no two people being so angry at each other than they can't work together." There were teachers who would "carry the ball but not dominate."

One significant result of the initiative was that teachers as a group raised their expectations of children's academic achievement. According to the Reading Specialist who came to the school in 1988, there were only 15 fifth grade reading-level books in a school that had two fifth grade classes and only one class set of fourth grade reading books for three classes because the teachers did not expect to use the higher level books. Today, the great majority of students are assigned books appropriate to their grade level. Anecdotal remarks from the interviews refer to students' enhanced love of reading and growth in writing skills.

Student outcome data, however, are mixed. Report card marks (percentage receiving a C or better) have improved by 6 percentage points since 1990 in reading and by 11 points in math, science, and social studies. The overall percentage of students reading grade-level books has increased slightly (3 points) while scores on an Informal Reading Inventory show gains in two grade levels (6 points and 12 points), a drop in another (13 points) and relative stability in another grade level since 1990. Standardized NCE scores from 1992 and 1993 show a small drop in students' reading comprehension. Math scores, now the subject of teachers' attention, showed a sharper decline.

Teachers remain determined to continue altering classroom instructional approaches to raise student achievement. Convinced they are on the right path, they meet regularly in committees and schoolwide planning sessions to keep up the momentum for improvement. It is a measure of their organizational maturity that they have decided not to pursue any new grant opportunities for the moment but instead to consolidate their efforts on ongoing efforts. Cuts in the staff have increased workloads at a time when enrollment has grown, and the heavy round of committee meetings has led to weariness on the part of some participants. But esprit remains high and as one teacher put it, "some people are tired but no one complains."

# *Case Study: Chamberlain Elementary School*

The Cluster Initiative led to some positive changes at Chamberlain School, but it did not bring about whole school renewal there. The Cluster Initiative was one of several school improvement efforts that moved the faculty in the direction of greater cohesion, but the process of change at the school was slower than that of the other Cluster Initiative elementary schools. A core of faculty have sought to implement innovation in an atmosphere of internal staff divisions, administrative turnover, and complacency about low student achievement. One observer noted that "Chamberlain is a school that reminds us our imaginary time frame [for change] is too fast."

Like nearby Holland School, Chamberlain serves a low-income population (92.7 percent) of African-American students (96 percent) in grades K-5. Unlike Holland, however, the Cluster Initiative never involved the whole faculty in common planning for school change despite the fact that the school was less than half the size (270 students) of Holland and had only 14 regular classroom teachers. Few had had any contact with PATHS/PRISM before. Of the $45,000 available to the school in the Cluster Initiative, only $9500 (21 percent) was spent. At the outset, a small group of five teachers directed the effort with the hope that broader faculty interest would be ignited as the initiative moved forward. The development of a Friday afternoon cross-grade interdisciplinary elective period did indeed involve all the faculty but changes in everyday classroom instruction did not emerge from the PATHS/PRISM effort. However, it is possible that the Governance Council that has been created as a result of the initiative might eventually become the vehicle for schoolwide curriculum change.

In the summer of 1990, a committee of faculty identified two themes, an interdisciplinary elective double period called "menu time" and the use of computers in instruction, as their initial goals for Cluster Initiative work. At the end of the 1990-91 school year, they submitted a proposal to PATHS/PRISM to spend their first allotment of $20,000 on computers and software for each classroom. The PATHS/PRISM staff turned down the proposal on the grounds that it did not represent the consensus of the faculty and was not grounded in a carefully thought-out vision for curriculum change. The staff did not choose to re-write the proposal the following fall. The rejection of the plan led to a rift between some of the Chamberlain faculty and PATHS/PRISM and, as a result, little activity on the initiative occurred for nearly a year after that.

Some Chamberlain faculty charged that PATHS/PRISM failed to communicate its expectations clearly to them and avoided working closely with them because they were perceived as a divided staff. PATHS/PRISM staffers, for their part, acknowledge that they might have been more aggressive in remaining in close touch with the Chamberlain planning group, but felt that the group was unwilling to do the hard work of gaining broad-based consensus on a curriculum proposal that would make a real difference in regular classroom instruction.

Although the rift with PATHS/PRISM never fully healed, the menu time plan was revived in the spring of 1992 and, with the support of Cluster Initiative funds, was put into effect in the fall of 1992. The menu time elective period allows

students to sign up for interdisciplinary courses that embed academic instruction in cross-age "hands-on" activities. Courses have included instruction in an arts-oriented "cultural creations," a performing arts class, gymnastics, computers, reading activities at the local library, cooking, and newspaper publishing. The staff and parents spoke enthusiastically about the children's eagerness for the Friday afternoon activities which, in the view of many, was "dead time" before. The all-school performances that have come out of menu time have enlivened the school's social climate and have fostered a greater sense of community. Overall, there was agreement that the planning required for menu time and the courses themselves had helped bring an otherwise divided faculty together around a common objective.

The other area where the Cluster Initiative had an impact was on the formation of a Governance Council. PATHS/PRISM funds supported staff time to write an Educational Plan in the summer of 1993. The Plan will be submitted for a staff vote in 1994 and, if approved, will be forward to the District for its approval. This movement towards becoming a site-based managed school appears to be having a positive effect at the school. Those interviewed saw the Governance Council as a mechanism to improve staff communication and influence over policy and to engage parents more fully in decision-making. The staff involved in changing school governance have forged ahead despite the fact that they have had four different principals during the process. In one teacher's words, "We had hit bottom and had no place to go but up. We saw all the changes in administration and said 'we have to do it ourselves.' We had to find a focus."

Unlike the other Cluster Initiative elementary schools whose staffs were deeply absorbed in curriculum change and found the creation of a Governance Council something of a distraction, the Chamberlain faculty focused more on governance as a vehicle of change with the hope that it might create the kind of faculty cohesion that would lead to classroom innovation. There is widespread acknowledgment among administrators and faculty that the lack of teamwork, caused in part by administrative turnover and the mix of personalities, and the broader development of teacher leadership at the school are problems that must be addressed. While faculty claim that they talk to each other frequently and are unafraid to disagree openly, the lack of esprit and unity is evident. However, the appointment of a permanent principal in November 1993, has sparked optimism that movement toward greater collegiality and curriculum change will be accelerated. Unlike many of the faculty at Nelson Middle School who were wary of a new principal, the Chamberlain faculty looked forward to the arrival of a principal who could provide leadership in change efforts.

One of the tasks of the new principal and the Governance Council will be to bring together disparate initiatives at the school. The school has been successful in garnering several outside grants, including a $300,000 two-year grant from the state to support desegregation efforts (a Montessori kindergarten, a computer lab, and instruction in global education), a $100,000 grant from a local college and a foundation to support science instruction, and a $7000 grant from a nearby business firm. In addition, they receive money from Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects ($187,000 for 1993-94) and a $5000 grant from PATHS/PRISM for ongoing elementary school renewal activities. However, using the classification scheme developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, Chamberlain appears to be a "Christmas Tree School" with a number of unfocused efforts that fail to bring coordinated

schoolwide change in everyday classroom instruction. The lack of focus in these efforts can be attributed in part to the style of the previous principal who was skilled at writing grant proposals but who failed to include the staff in planning and coordinating the initiatives.

Another issue that needs addressing is low student achievement. Although the percentage of students making a C or better on report cards has risen by 11-15 points in three of four subjects since 1990, the percentage reading on grade level (as measured by reading book level) has dropped 9 points during that period. Data from an Informal Reading Inventory show a mixed pattern, with gains in grades 2 and 3 and declines in grades 4 and 5. Further, comparisons of standardized test scores from 1992 and 1993 show NCE decreases in both reading and math, with the math declines being especially sharp (9 points in computation and 11 points in concepts and applications across all grades).

These questions of student achievement should lend urgency to efforts to accelerate schoolwide change at Chamberlain. Since 1990, the dogged efforts on the part of some faculty have brought about slow but sure progress toward greater staff communication. Some of this progress has come about as a result of the Cluster Initiative but the impact of Chapter 1 Schoolwide Projects and the Instructional Support Team associated with Special Education initiatives have helped improve collegiality as well. Those interviewed rated their school improvement level as having moved from a stage of a few unfocused initiatives to being somewhere between a "Christmas Tree" school and "emergent restructuring," a stage where common planning has begun to take place. The new principal's actions will be pivotal in moving change forward to a level where teachers and other staff can become a self-conscious learning community where coordinated efforts come out of a common vision centering on students' needs.

# *Notes*

1. O'Day, J.A. and Smith, M.S. "Systemic Reform and Educational Opportunity," in S. Fuhrman (ed.), *Designing Coherent Education Policy.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1993, p. 259.

2. These philosophical assumptions reflect the vision of the Philadelphia Alliance for the Teaching of Humanities (PATHS) which was founded in 1984 by business and education leaders in Philadelphia. PATHS later merged with the Philadelphia Renaissance in Science and Mathematics (PRISM) to form PATHS/PRISM: The Philadelphia Partnership for Education. The Rockefeller Foundation organized the Collaboratives for Humanities and Arts Teaching (CHART), a national network of program sites whose projects were based on the PATHS model of seeking school reform through teacher-driven curriculum change. See Maeroff, G. I., *The Empowerment of Teachers.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1988, and Jennings, R. and Renyi, J. (eds.), *Fire in the Eyes of Youth.* St. Paul: Occasional Press, 1993, for a history of CHART activities.

3. Bryk, A., Easton, J.Q., Kerbow, D., Rollow, S.G., Sebring, P.A. *A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago.* Report of the Steering Committee of the Consortium on Chicago School Research, 5835 S. Kimbark Ave., Chicago, Illinois, 1993, p. 15.

4. The names of the schools have been changed for the purposes of this report.

5. The term "teacher" is used here to refer to teachers, reading specialists, program support teachers, counsellors, and librarians.

6. Weiss, C.H. "School Decision Making About What?" *Teachers College Record* 95, Fall, 1993: 69-92.

7. McLaughlin, M.W. "What Matters Most in Teachers' Workplace Context?" in J.W. Little and M.W. McLaughlin (eds.), *Teachers' Work: Individuals, Colleagues, and Contexts.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1993, pp. 79-103.

8. The standardized test results are particularly problematic since changes reported here have occurred over just a one-year period. Similar changes would have to be repeated for several years before much faith could be put in the results. There are many other problems with reliance on norm-referenced standardized test scores including the fact that they are not tightly aligned with the curriculum that is actually taught. Report card marks are also suspect since teachers' judgments can be highly variable and subjective. Judging reading achievement by the book level a student is reading can also be an inaccurate measure because the student may not actually be reading the material with proficiency.

9. Clayton, C.E. "Chapter 1 Evaluation: Progress, Problems, and Possibilities," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* Vol. 13, Winter, 1991, pp. 345-352; Fagan, T.W. and Heid, C.A. "Chapter 1 Program Improvement: Opportunity and Practice," *Phi Delta Kappan,* Vol. 72, No. 8, April, 1991, pp. 582-585.

10. *Education Week*, August 4, 1993, pp. 1, 42.

11. Weiss, C.H., *op cit.*, p. 85.

12. Clune, W.H., "Systemic Educational Policy: A Conceptual Framework," in S. Fuhrman (ed.), *Designing Coherent Education Policy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., p. 129; see also O'Day, J.A. and Smith, M.S., also in Fuhrman (Ed.), p. 253.

13. Furhman, S.H., "The Politics of Coherence," in S. Furhman (ed.), *Designing Coherent Education Policy*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, Inc., p. 6.

# *Appendix A: Research Methods*

The data used in this study came from the documentary files of the Cluster Initiative, interviews with participants, and brief observations of governance meetings at the schools. The Office of Accountability and Assessment of the School District of Philadelphia supplied information on school demographics, test scores, report card grades, and other school indicators.

The extensive documentary file from the initiative had several different types of information. Early concept papers, planning memos, and drafts of the Cluster Initiative prospectus revealed the thinking of PATHS/PRISM staff as they put the effort together in 1989 and early 1990. The files contained numerous short reports to the PATHS/PRISM Board of Trustees outlining the progress of the Cluster Initiative schools as well as three longer Status Reports. Copies of all correspondence relating to the initiative were also available as were reports from two consultants who worked with PATHS/PRISM in 1990 and 1991. Other materials in the files included the following: annual reports from most of the participating schools outlining their plans and expenditures, finalized Educational Plans from three schools, minutes of committee meetings, and transcripts of focus groups by school held during the April, 1990 and April, 1991 retreats for Cluster Initiative participants. School Improvement Plans were collected in the fall of 1993.

PATHS/PRISM distributed a questionnaire to school staff in June, 1991 asking for their comments on work of the Cluster Initiative. The response rates are impossible to calculate since it was not clear how many staff and parents received the questionnaire. Those who filled them out did not always indicate whether they were teachers, parents, administrators, or para-professionals. Ten or more responses were received from just three schools: Nelson (10), Brennan (14), and Wolcott (36). The comments on these questionnaires were used to illustrate points that other respondents had made in the personal interviews.

Elizabeth Useem interviewed a total of 80 participants in the Cluster Initiative between October and December of 1993. All but ten of the interviews were conducted in person with the rest being conducted over the telephone. The interviews were semi-structured in form and ranged from approximately twenty minutes to one hour with the average interview lasting about 40 minutes. The Director of the program was interviewed for six hours and another program officer for three and one-half hours.

In each school, a minimum of seven school staff members were interviewed, including the principal. In two cases, former principals were interviewed because they had been centrally involved in the initiative. One "low involvement" teacher was interviewed in each school; the other staff interviews included people who were leaders of the Cluster Initiative at the school site and who had been or were currently the union Building Representative at the school. Two parents from each school were interviewed who were either on the school's Governance Council or Leadership Team or who were current or former Presidents of the Home and School Association.

In all, the number of staff and parents interviewed per school was as follows:

Brennan School — 9
Holland School — 9
Perry Middle School — 12
Preston School — 11
Nelson Middle School — 11
Wolcott School — 10
Chamberlain School — 10

Interviews were also conducted with six current or former PATHS/PRISM staff members and two staff members of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

One governance meeting was observed in each school. The types of meetings included the following: Governance Council, Leadership Team, Principal's Cabinet, Parent Involvement Committee, all-day full staff meeting, and Instructional Support Team. At this latter school, a meeting between staff and parent representatives with local university partners was also observed. Intensive classroom observations were not conducted.

Longitudinal data by school on certain types of school climate measures are not included in this study. For example, the number of students suspended or retained in grade is not used because the rates are often a function of school policy rather than actual behavior or achievement level. School policies can change over time without there being a corresponding change in student behavior or performance. Comparisons over time (since 1990) in average daily attendance of students by school are also not included here because of conflicting sets of data. Longitudinal attendance figures for school instructional staff are not displayed because the available figures include unpaid leaves of absence and maternity leaves, a highly variable number which can skew the annual percentages, especially in small schools.

# *Appendix B*

**TABLE 1**

**School Indicators**

1992-93

| School Name | Number of Students | Percent Poverty* | Percent AFDC** | Average Daily Attendance | Absenteeism Instructional Staff*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brennan | 464 | 94.4% | 70.9% | 90.6% | 2.8% |
| Holland | 664 | 89.5 | 58.7 | 89.1 | 5.3 |
| Preston | 270 | 49.5 | 20.0 | 94.0 | 3.3 |
| Wolcott | 555 | 90.9 | 61.1 | 90.1 | 3.6 |
| Chamberlain | 272 | 92.7 | 63.7 | 90.4 | 6.4 |
| Perry Middle | 1,146 | 89.6 | 57.7 | 82.8 | 3.2 |
| Nelson Middle | 816 | 85.5 | 51.8 | 83.7 | 7.8 |

*Poverty figure is based on the percentage of children receiving subsidized meals and/or living in households that receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)

**Percentage of children living in households that receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children

***Instructional staff includes full-time teachers, cousellors, librarians, and administrators. The attendance figure includes sick leave, leave without pay, and personal leave.

## APPENDIX B

### TABLE 2

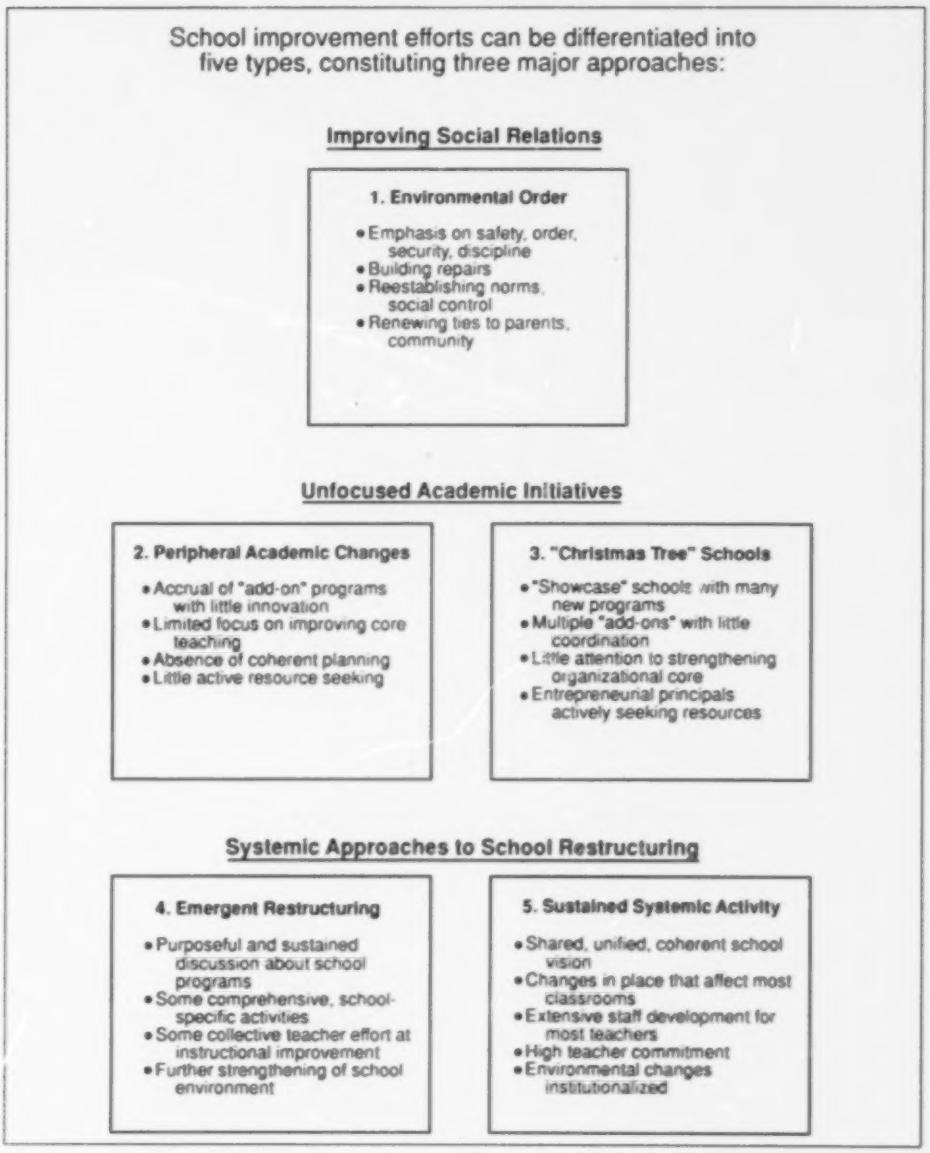
**Money Spent on the Cluster Initiative at School Sites**

| School Name | Funds Spent | Percentage Spent of Funds Available ($45,000) |
|---|---|---|
| Brennan | $35,594 | 79% |
| Holland | 40,185 | 89 |
| Preston | 35,005 | 78 |
| Wolcott | 31,536 | 70 |
| Chamberlain | 9,469 | 21 |
| Perry Middle | 15,605 | 35 |
| Nelson Middle | 6,380 | 14 |

# *Appendix C*

## Classifying School Improvements during Reform

School improvement efforts can be differentiated into five types, constituting three major approaches:


Improving Social Relations
1. Environmental Order
• Emphasis on safety, order, security, discipline
• Building repairs
• Reestablishing norms, social control
• Renewing ties to parents, community
Unfocused Academic Initiatives
2. Peripheral Academic Changes
• Accrual of "add-on" programs with little innovation
• Limited focus on improving core teaching
• Absence of coherent planning
• Little active resource seeking
3. "Christmas Tree" Schools
• "Showcase" schools with many new programs
• Multiple "add-ons" with little coordination
• Little attention to strengthening organizational core
• Entrepreneurial principals actively seeking resources
Systemic Approaches to School Restructuring
4. Emergent Restructuring
• Purposeful and sustained discussion about school programs
• Some comprehensive, school-specific activities
• Some collective teacher effort at instructional improvement
• Further strengthening of school environment
5. Sustained Systemic Activity
• Shared, unified, coherent school vision
• Changes in place that affect most classrooms
• Extensive staff development for most teachers
• High teacher commitment
• Environmental changes institutionalized

Source: Anthony S. Bryk , *et al., A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago*, Consortium of Chicago School Research, University of Chicago, July 1993, p.15.

# *Appendix D: Indicators of Student Achievement*

**TABLE 1**

Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above National 51st Percentile in Reading Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension, 1992 and 1993, By School*

| | Reading Vocabulary | | Reading Comprehension | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade | 1992 | 1993 | 1992 | 1993 |
| *Brennan School* | | | | |
| 2nd | 11.0% | 11.7% | 9.5% | 18.7% |
| 3rd | 24.2 | 39.7 | 26.5 | 32.9 |
| 4th | 20.8 | 15.7 | 13.0 | 11.7 |
| *Holland School* | | | | |
| 2nd | 22.8 | 27.4 | 22.1 | 27.8 |
| 3rd | 26.4 | 27.2 | 25.6 | 23.0 |
| 4th | 16.8 | 15.0 | 19.9 | 12.9 |
| *Preston School* | | | | |
| 2nd | 52.8 | 53.4 | 43.4 | 39.7 |
| 3rd | 67.4 | 47.4 | 65.3 | 57.2 |
| 4th | 45.9 | 36.7 | 45.9 | 44.9 |
| *Wolcott School* | | | | |
| 2nd | 17.8 | 9.9 | 16.9 | 8.8 |
| 3rd | 8.3 | 25.5 | 22.2 | 26.0 |
| 4th | 18.3 | 9.8 | 20.9 | 14.1 |
| 5th | 16.1 | 10.7 | 16.7 | 8.9 |
| *Chamberlain School* | | | | |
| 2nd | 25.1 | 26.4 | 18.8 | 25.7 |
| 3rd | 18.9 | 22.6 | 8.1 | 14.7 |
| 4th | 13.2 | 5.1 | 7.9 | 12.8 |
| 5th | 16.7 | 4.8 | 33.3 | 14.6 |
| *Perry Middle School* | | | | |
| 5th | 6.4 | 1.6 | 8.6 | 4.9 |
| 6th | 12.9 | 14.9 | 27.2 | 20.5 |
| 7th | 20.3 | 19.7 | 21.4 | 26.7 |
| 8th | 20.7 | 23.2 | 21.8 | 25.0 |
| *Nelson Middle School* | | | | |
| 5th | 14.2 | 9.3 | 17.7 | 16.7 |
| 6th | 5.3 | 9.4 | 16.8 | 16.8 |
| 7th | 21.5 | 15.7 | 20.8 | 18.4 |
| 8th | 21.0 | 25.0 | 20.9 | 26.5 |

*CTB Macmillan/McGraw Hill Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills/4th Edition

**APPENDIX D**

**TABLE 2**

Percentage of Students Reading on Grade Level*

| School | Percent, June, 1993 | Change Since June, 1990 |
|---|---|---|
| Brennan | 54% | -1 |
| Holland | 55 | -4 |
| Preston | 86 | +18 |
| Wolcott | 64 | +3 |
| Chamberlain | 68 | -9 |
| Perry Middle | 39 | NA |
| Nelson Middle | 32 | -21 |

*Report card account of level of book student is currently reading

## APPENDIX D

### TABLE 3

Percentage of Students Reading on Grade Level as Reported in School Improvement Plans

| School | Grade | Baseline | June, 1993 | Measure Used |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Brennan* | | June, 1991 | | |
| | 2 | 37% | 31% | Book level student |
| | 3 | 41 | 47 | currently reading |
| | 4 | 43 | 72 | |
| *Holland* | | June, 1990 | | |
| | All grades | 24 | 43 | Teacher-developed Informal Reading Inventory |
| *Wolcott* | | June, 1990 | | |
| | 2 | 29 | 41 | Macmillan Informal |
| | 3 | 28 | 34 | Reading Inventory |
| | 4 | 51 | 38 | |
| | 5 | 65 | 63 | |
| *Chamberlain* | | June, 1991 | | |
| | 2 | 22 | 48 | Botel Informal |
| | 3 | 2 | 39 | Reading Inventory |
| | 4 | 53 | 30 | |
| | 5 | 33 | 23 | |
| *Perry Middle* | | June, 1991 | | |
| | 5 | 12 | 25 | Stanford Diagnostic |
| | 6 | 16 | 37 | Evaluation |
| | 7 | 45 | 54 | |
| | 8 | 12 | 35 | |

Data not available for Preston and Nelson Schools

## APPENDIX D

## TABLE 4

Percentage of Students Making As, Bs, or Cs on Report Card

| | Reading | | Mathematics | | Science | | Social Studies | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School | Percent 6/93 | Change since 6/90 | Percent 6/93 | Change since 6/90 | Percent 6/93 | Change since 6/90 | Percent 6/93 | Change since 6/90 |
| Brennan | 75% | 7 | 86% | 9 | 91% | 4 | 89% | 9 |
| Holland | 80 | 10 | 93 | 13 | 79 | -15 | 96 | 8 |
| Preston | 95 | 7 | 95 | 6 | 99 | 1 | 97 | 0 |
| Wolcott | 74 | 6 | 85 | 11 | 94 | 11 | 92 | 11 |
| Chamberlain | 76 | 11 | 85 | 13 | 79 | -4 | 90 | 15 |
| Perry | 73 | 14 | 62 | 8 | 65 | 8 | 69 | 15 |
| Nelson | 62 | 9 | 47 | 10 | 70 | 20 | 55 | 14 |

## APPENDIX D

### TABLE 5

Comparison of 1992 and 1993 Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) Scores of Students Taking CTBS Standardized Tests in Both Years, By School

| School | Reading Comprehension | | | Math Concepts and Applications | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1992 NCE | 1993 NCE | NCE Difference | 1992 NCE | 1993 NCE | NCE Difference |
| *Brennan* | | | | | | |
| Overall | 34.8 | 38.4 | 3.6 | 42.7 | 43.0 | 0.3 |
| Grade 2 | 27.8 | 32.0 | 4.2 | 41.6 | 41.6 | -0.1 |
| 3 | 34.2 | 44.0 | 9.8 | 44.8 | 46.4 | 1.6 |
| 4 | 42.9 | 38.5 | -4.5 | 41.3 | 40.5 | -0.8 |
| *Holland* | | | | | | |
| Overall | 38.3 | 39.2 | 0.9 | 37.0 | 36.5 | -0.5 |
| Grade 2 | 36.0 | 41.2 | 5.2 | 39.3 | 42.0 | 2.8 |
| 3 | 38.1 | 38.6 | 0.6 | 35.3 | 34.3 | -0.9 |
| 4 | 41.4 | 37.7 | -3.7 | 36.6 | 32.7 | -4.0 |
| *Preston* | | | | | | |
| Overall | 49.7 | 51.2 | 1.5 | 57.3 | 53.9 | -3.4 |
| Grade 2 | 44.7 | 48.4 | 3.6 | 56.9 | 55.3 | -1.5 |
| 3 | 51.3 | 56.1 | 4.8 | 58.4 | 54.1 | -4.3 |
| 4 | 53.7 | 49.0 | -4.7 | 56.4 | 51.8 | -4.7 |
| *Wolcott* | | | | | | |
| Overall | 35.0 | 34.1 | -0.9 | 42.3 | 36.7 | -5.6 |
| Grade 2 | 33.3 | 28.9 | -4.5 | 49.9 | 41.4 | -8.5 |
| 3 | 31.6 | 38.4 | 6.8 | 39.3 | 36.9 | -2.4 |
| 4 | 39.9 | 33.7 | -6.2 | 40.4 | 32.8 | -7.7 |
| 5 | 35.5 | 35.2 | -0.3 | 38.2 | 34.8 | -3.4 |
| *Chamberlain* | | | | | | |
| Overall | 36.0 | 32.4 | -3.6 | 40.4 | 29.3 | -11.1 |
| Grade 2 | 40.9 | 28.2 | -12.7 | 54.1 | 31.0 | -23.2 |
| 3 | 38.4 | 34.9 | -3.5 | 46.5 | 29.8 | -16.8 |
| 4 | 33.5 | 30.4 | -3.2 | 31.9 | 25.2 | -6.7 |
| 5 | 32.6 | 36.0 | 3.4 | 31.8 | 31.9 | 0.1 |
| *Perry Middle* | | | | | | |
| Overall | 35.6 | 36.6 | 1.0 | 36.9 | 36.7 | -0.2 |
| Grade 5 | 33.4 | 28.8 | -4.7 | 31.8 | 30.2 | -1.6 |
| 6 | 34.7 | 35.9 | 1.2 | 35.8 | 38.9 | 3.2 |
| 7 | 37.2 | 38.5 | 1.3 | 40.8 | 38.1 | -2.7 |
| 8 | 36.6 | 40.4 | 3.8 | 37.3 | 35.2 | -2.1 |
| *Nelson Middle* | | | | | | |
| Overall | 37.3 | 37.6 | 0.3 | 35.2 | 34.7 | -0.5 |
| Grade 5 | 32.8 | 30.3 | -2.5 | 32.5 | 28.4 | -4.1 |
| 6 | 38.9 | 35.1 | -3.8 | 37.9 | 36.5 | -1.4 |
| 7 | 31.2 | 38.4 | 7.3 | 33.0 | 32.2 | -0.8 |
| 8 | 41.9 | 43.7 | 1.8 | 35.3 | 38.4 | 3.1 |

* These scores are based on results from all students in these schools taking the CTB

Macmillan/McGraw Hill Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills/4th Edition during both 1992 and 1993. The NCE is an arithmetic way of expressing percentile scores and shows a students' standing relative to other students. These scores are derived from dividing the normal curve into 98 equal intervals and are used in achievement analyses of schools as part of the Chapter 1 Accountability process. Chapter 1 schools in Philadelphia are expected to achieve an average gain of 2 NCE points annually in both reading and math. Change scores from year to year, however, are not a particularly reliable gauge of school performance because of standard errors in measurement.

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